

## **Ruin and Restoration 2 Kings 17-20**

This past week has been so refreshing. In the middle of August, the morning temperatures have been in the 60's! Football season is right around the corner. And fans are getting excited. For Penn State fans, they have been playing under a dark cloud because of the horrific news about their former coach Jerry Sandusky. This long time coach was convicted on 45 counts of sexual abuse. Sickening. Despicable. Infuriating. I recently read where his son was changing his name because of the association with his dad (other children of criminals have done the same). Now, let me ask you: what if this coach's son grew up to be the greatest president in United States history? Would that shock you? What if he became the most influential Christian leader in the world, leading the nation in revival? Unlikely?

I definitely pray for this family, and believe that God can restore them, and use them for his glory, just like he can use anyone who experiences his redeeming grace. The good news of the gospel is that you do not have to turn out like your father. If you find this hard to believe, then consider Hezekiah. God raised up this Judean King, while a dark cloud was hanging over the nation, to lead them to a time of restoration. He was the greatest king since David, yet his dad was perhaps the most evil king in Judah's history. Here was an example of his evil father: "He even burned his son as an offering, according to the despicable practices of the nations" (2 Kings 16:3). But God, by his grace brought restoration in a season of ruin through the leadership of Hezekiah. In these chapters, we are reminded of the grace of God in bringing refreshing fall-like seasons in our life, and encouraged to seek the Lord like Hezekiah.

### **RUIN IN ISRAEL (17:1-41)**

Israel's "rain delay" is over. In 2 Kings 17, the writer describes the Assyrian storm and Israel's fall into exile. Back in 1 Kings 14:15, Ahijah told Jeroboam that the Lord would "root up" Israel and "scatter them beyond the Euphrates" (15). But God proved to be "gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" delaying judgment (2 Kings 10:30; 13; 14:23-29). God continued to display his grace by saving Israel from various enemies through Elisha (2 Kings 6-7), unnamed saviors (13:5), and Jeroboam (14:27). But the previous chapters have also pointed ahead to the coming exile. The writer made us aware of the external and internal instability of the northern kingdom in chapter 15.

In 2 Kings 17:1-5, we are introduced to the nine-year reigning king, Hoshea. His name sounds promising ("salvation") but unfortunately he cannot live up to that name. His biography in verses 1-5 sounds much like the other kings, with a few surprising

exceptions. While he “did evil in the sight of the Lord” (no surprise), the author adds, “yet not as the kings of Israel who were before him” (2). We are left to guess about what made him stand out. The author then notes his political power plays between Assyria and Egypt angers Shalmaneser, “king of Assyria.” Six times in these verses we read of the “king of “Assyria” (Davis, 243). He dominates the narrative. The angered king first puts Hoshea prison. Eventually, he captured Samaria, and scattered the northern kingdom throughout a wide area (6, 18:11). The ten tribes of Israel are no more.

## **Worship God Alone**

Next, the writer provides a bit of sermon to explain “why” Israel went off into exile (7-17). One could give a number of reasons from the human perspective for their fall, but the writer is more concerned with the underlying problem. And that problem is made clear by the repetition in the chapter. The verb translated as “worship” reverberates throughout this chapter, with either Yahweh or “other gods” as the object, no fewer than eight times (Yahweh - 25, 28, 36, 39; other gods – 7, 35, 37, 38). It can also be translated “fear” or “revere.” The people looked to other gods for provision, joy, satisfaction, and salvation.

We need to realize that idolatry is not confined to shrines and pagan temples; it resides in the hearts of people, who look to other things to give them what only God can give them. These things can be things like money, sexual pleasure, power, or success. All sin problems are worship problems. Wrong God = wrong lifestyle.

The author warns us about the danger of rejecting the real God. We might arrange our application in three parts. ***First, do not reject the God who redeems (7).*** The writer calls our attention to the Exodus and the giving of the Ten Commandments throughout these verses. God redeemed his people “out of the land of Egypt from the hand of Pharaoh” (7), yet Israel was chose to “fear” other gods (7b). Instead of lasting gratitude for God, Israel looked to other gods.

Guard your heart against ingratitude. The drift into idolatry and immorality begins there. What is often missing in corporate worship services is not better music, but rather, a lack of “singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs *with thankfulness in your hearts to God*” (Col 3:16, my emphasis). Marvel at the grace of God not only in corporate worship, but also in daily worship. Believers must seek to cultivate the discipline of “giving thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thess 5:18).

The God of grace has delivered us out of bondage to sin and from judgment, through Jesus Christ, who has led the ultimate exodus. Thank him for his grace! Remember this about idols: they can never give you grace. They only enslave you. When you reject the God of the Bible, you are rejecting grace. Therefore, consider what God has done for us, and how foolish your other options are.

**Second, do not reject the God who satisfies (8-12; 16-17).** The writer goes on to tell us of the inevitable results of idolatry. The people lived immoral lives (8), and they worshiped multiple false gods (9-12, 16, 17). Why? The Psalmist explains, “The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply” (16:4). Idols only led to sorrow; they never bring satisfaction. Asherim, Baal, the golden calves, or Molech could not give what the human heart longs for, namely, the God who redeems and satisfies.

If money is your idol, then you will never have enough. If you do not have any, it will crush you to the point of suicidal thoughts. If being liked is your idol, then being unpopular will crush you. If success is your idol, then you will live on a treadmill of pursuing one accomplishment after another. If sexual pleasure is your source of greatest pleasure, then no person (or picture of a person) will ever thrill you enough. If a particular drug is your source of hope and strength, then you will only be enslaved, never liberated. These gods will not satisfy you. They say to you “Serve me.” But you need to preach a better sermon back to them. “In his presence is fullness of joy, and at his right hand our pleasures forevermore” (Ps 16:11). Deeper joy and more lasting joy are found in the presence of God.

**Third, do not reject the God who warns (13-15).** Israel knew better. After the Exodus, God gave Israel his law and told them how to live. He also sent prophets (13). But they “would not listen” (14a, cf., 35-40). Why? They had a heart problem. They were “stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the Lord their God” (14b). They were like stubborn farm animals. Their stubbornness, like ours, stemmed from “unbelief.” Such was the history of Israel. They exasperated God with their unbelief. The Psalmist recaps the history in Psalm 78, and says in verse 32, “In spite of all this, they still sinned; despite all the wonders they did not believe.” Israel’s fall into exile reminds of the problem of “hardening our hearts” to God’s word (cf., Ps 95:7-11).

As a result, of despising God’s word and resisting his warnings, “They went after false idols and became false” (15). Here is another truth about idolatry: we become like that which we worship. “Those who make [idols] become like them” (Ps 115:8). In contrast, those who behold the glory of God are “being transformed into the same

image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor 3:18). If you do not heed the warnings of God, then you will become like your idols – “false” or “worthless” (NIV). Worship really does change you! Transformation happens from the inside out.

Several years ago, a four-year old girl in North Wales, had her complexion turn a yellow-orangish color. The doctor discovered the reason. She had been consuming 1.5 litres of Sunny Delight every day. (Did her parents have a tap?). The product was largely food coloring and sugar. The manufactures admitted that their product could turn a person orange, but only if consumed in large amounts (Davis, 250). And that is what happened. She became what she drank (temporarily). If you are constantly drinking in a love for praise, the love of money, the love of sexual pleasure, or the love of success, it will change you, also. Do not reject the warnings of Scripture. “Turn from idols, to serve the living and true God ... Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess 1:9-10).

***Finally, do not reject the God who judges (18-23).*** Israel’s rejection of his grace and his word, provoked God to anger (18a). He removed them out his sight (18b, 23a), as we read, “Israel was exiled from their own land to Assyria until this day” (23b). In between this word of judgment, the writer comments on Judah, how they also “did not keep the commandments of the Lord their God, but walked in the customs that Israel had introduced” (19). This surely points the coming fate of Judah. Why did God judge them? They followed the ways of Jeroboam, whom they made king, when the kingdom split (21-22). They continued to persist in sin.

Recently, several more baseball players were found to be cheating (again!) by using illegal performance-enhancing drugs. They were banished from baseball for a time. In their pride, they ignored the warnings. Most players and fans want these guys to face consequences; they want justice. God gave Israel warning after warning, but they rejected him. Now, they were banished into foreign lands. Do not think you are the exception to God’s judgment. God offers you grace, embrace it.

The writer continues speak of the northern kingdom in verses 24-41. The focus in the section is still on worship. While Israel is exiled, other peoples fill the land. Assyria’s king brought others from close by and far away to dwell there (24). Who do they worship while residing in Israel’s land? We read that at first they did not worship the Lord, but the Lord sent “lions” among them, which killed some of them (25). God demands exclusive worship from the nations. He is not a tribal deity. He does not always send lions, but he always demands worship. The king of Assyria then actually responds better than Israel to this warning. He sent an exiled priest back to the land to instruct the people in Samaria on how to worship.

What happened next? We read that the nations worshiped Yahweh alongside of other gods (29-33). But we should not read this as if God accepted such syncretism, as verses 34-39 makes clear. This displeased him, like Israel's syncretism displeased him. Apparently, the priest taught the corrupt worship that Israel had been practicing. Mixed worship is not acceptable worship (37-38). Provan summarizes, "What is clear by the end of the chapter, then, is that the exile of Israel has not led to any improvement in the religion of the people who dwell in the land.... Nothing has changed" (251).

The whole chapter calls us to examine our hearts. Who or what are you worshiping? Is it Yahweh plus some other god? This syncretism does not glorify God, and it will lead you into an unfaithful life. Enjoy creation, steward creation, be thankful for creation; but do not worship created things. Worship Creator and Redeemer alone. John concludes his first letter by simply saying, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

### **RESTORATION IN JUDAH (18:1-20:21)**

The previous chapters of 2 Kings (16-17) gave us a terrible picture of not only Israel but also of Judah. Will they head off into exile also? Not yet. For what we read about in chapters 18-20 is a time of relief from the people of Judah, as a new king takes the throne: Hezekiah, during the third year of Hoshea in Israel. He does not take after his father Ahaz, but after his father, David. His twenty-nine year reign is briefly summarized in the verses 1-8, where we see that he "did right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that David his father had done" (3). He is not merely similar to David, like Asa or Jehoshaphat, but is more like a "second David." He faces his "Goliath" in Assyria's king, Sennacherib, who like Goliath, boasts in himself and taunts Yahweh. He leads the people into a period of restoration. How so? He led the people back to true worship, and he demonstrated trust in God.

#### **Returning to True Worship (18:4)**

One act that sets him apart from previous kings is his removal of "the high places" (4a). We have grown weary of the line, "but the high places were not removed" (1 Kings 15:14; 22:43; 2 Kings 12:3; 14:4; 15:4, 35). He cut down "pillars" (symbols of male deity) and "the Asherah poles" (symbols of female deity) (4b). He also broke "into pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made" (4c). This refers to the snake in the wilderness story (Num 21:4-9), which was never intended for worship (Provan, 252).

Are there some idols that need to be removed in your own temple? This past week we had a very strange thing happen. My son, James was sleeping on the third floor, only to awaken to a bat flying around the room. He also heard something flying around in the adjacent room/attic. He opened the door, turned on the light and counted twelve bats! We called the “Batman” the next day, and he counted twenty-two of these critters in our attic, who were coming through the outside vents, and then he removed them. He then put up screens to keep them out. You do not welcome bats. You cannot welcome idols either. Yet, many are more troubled by bats, than their “Baal’s.” Remove them, just as Hezekiah removed the idols from the temple. Deal with idols ruthlessly and relentlessly.

Hezekiah not only removed the idols, but he also led the people to cleanse the temple and celebrate the Passover. The chronicler focuses a lot of time on these events (2 Chron 29-31), where the writer of kings focuses more on the Assyrian crisis. But we need to realize that the two are not opposed to each other. Hezekiah’s return to true worship is linked to his stand against the enemy (7). And so it is with us. Everything flows out of worship. As we focus on the word of God, gather with the people of God, and remember the Substitute, that is when we begin to truly live on mission.

### **Relying on God Alone (18:5-20:21)**

The main virtue highlighted in Hezekiah’s life is his *trust*. Solomon is known for his wisdom; Josiah will be known for his reforms; Hezekiah is known for his unparalleled trust. The writer says, “He 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 who were before him” (5). The fruit of his trust was evidenced that he “held fast to the Lord” and in that he “did not depart from the commandments of the Lord” (6). The writer adds that the Lord was also “with him” and “wherever he went out, he prospered” (7). So he was like David in these ways: God was with him (only said of David and Hezekiah, Provan, 253), and he also had military success. Unlike Ahaz, his father, he did not yield to Assyria, but instead “rebelled against the king of Assyria and would not serve them” (7b). Like David, he also defeated the Philistines (8). They were the only two kings that we find who defeated the Philistines (Ibid).

In verses 9-12, the writer reminds the reader of what was going on in the northern kingdom. It is this context that puts the bold faith of Hezekiah in perspective. In his sixth year, Samaria was taken by Assyria (9-10). What will happen to Judah? They will be threatened too. Will they trust in God?

Hezekiah's trust is challenged in various ways in the following chapters. His challenges are like our challenges. As we identify with them, let us also consider the appropriate response to them: **prayer**. Hezekiah's prayer life is worthy of emulation.

### **Challenge #1: Crisis (18:13-19:37)**

The opening chapters do not begin the way we would anticipate. The new king of Assyria, Sennacherib, comes against Judah (13). And Hezekiah caves in. He gave Sennacherib silver, gold, and treasures from the temple and from the king's house (14-16). You might wonder, "I thought he rebelled against Assyria?" He did. But we must remember that verses 1-8 summarize his whole life. This opening story shows us a particular lapse, but that does not mean his whole life is evaluated by this one lapse. We are reminded that even the most faithful can have periods in which they cave in to pressure.

We expect to read no more of Sennacherib, but he decides the gold is not enough. He sends his army to his commanders to Jerusalem, trying to persuade Hezekiah to surrender. Notice the competing voice. Rabshakeh says, "Say to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: On what do you rest this trust of yours?' (19b). What does he focus on? Trust. It is mentioned in verses 19, 20, 21, 22, and 24, 30, and 19:30.

In his speech, Rabshakeh tries to sow the *seeds of doubt* in Hezekiah's heart. Like the evil one, he mixes truth with error. He first questions Hezekiah's trust in Egypt (21, 24). While Egypt apparently served as an ally, Isaiah said it was folly to trust in Egypt (Isa 30:1-7; 31:1-3). Sennacherib thinks it is folly to trust in Egypt because they cannot provide support. He was right about the folly of trusting Egypt, but just for the wrong reason.

Rabshakeh then arrogantly asks if Hezekiah's focus of trust is "the LORD our God" (22). He views Hezekiah's reforms negatively (22). Then he claims, "the LORD told him to come against this land and to destroy it" (25). He was right in that the Lord just used them to bring judgment upon the people (17:1-23; 18:9-12). And, we know that Isaiah prophesied about the Assyrians being the "rod of God's judgment against Israel and Judah" (Isa 10:5-19). But that was only part of the story (Olley, 323).

So an ultimatum is offered in verses 26-37. The basic thrust of the ensuing dialogue is that the people should not trust in Hezekiah, but should choose "life and not

death” (32) by surrendering to Assyria. The dialogue begins with the officials requesting that Rabshakeh speak in Aramaic, the language of international diplomacy, so that the people on the wall cannot hear them. But he thinks the people should be allowed to hear his offer, otherwise they will be left to the horrific realities of a siege (“eating dung” and “drinking urine”). He proceeds to tell the people that Hezekiah “will not be able to deliver” them out of their hand (29); and that they should not listen to Hezekiah’s words about “trusting” in the Lord (30). He tells the Judeans that if they will yield to Sennacherib, then they can live, and they will live in a land similar to their current land (31-32). He then insists that no god can match up against Assyria (33-35); in other words, Yahweh is no match for Sennacherib because he is as powerless as other gods. In obedience to Hezekiah’s command, the people do not respond (36). Then the king’s ambassadors report the situations to Hezekiah (37). How will Hezekiah respond to this rival voice? Will he cave in again?

***Express trust in God by requesting prayer (19:1-7).*** This time Hezekiah responds appropriately. He first seeks help from Yahweh through Isaiah (19:1-7). He humbly puts on sackcloth and goes into the temple (1). His sackcloth actually represented a heart of desperation, unlike some previous examples. Then he seeks help from Isaiah. Remember, the first time, he emptied the temple of wealth; now he goes for the right reason: to seek God’s help. He sends his messengers to Isaiah, confessing the humiliation and powerlessness of the nation (3), but holds out hope that Yahweh has heard Rabshakeh’s mockery and will punish him (4). He tells Isaiah to “lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left” (5). Isaiah responds by saying,

Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard with which the servants of the king of Assyria have reviled me. Behold I will put a spirit in him, so that he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land, and I will make him fall by the sword in his own land. (6)

It is a short, powerful promise. Will it come true? Spoiler alert: Yes. Check out the end of the story in 20:36-37. But let us pause and just point out how Hezekiah is asking for the prayers of the prophet. Are you seeking the prayers of God’s people in your crisis?

After we receive a geographical/military update in verses 8-9, we find Sennacherib’s response. He counsels Hezekiah against trusting in God. After all, those who have tried this sort of thing before have all been destroyed (10-12). So basically nothing has changed. Jerusalem is still in a desperate position. Sennacherib is still mocking God. Isaiah’s prophecy has accomplished nothing so far.



**Express trust in God by praying (19:14-19).** Hezekiah's first response was to seek the prayers of Isaiah. Now he prays himself. The following verses are powerful. They show us how one who trusts in Yahweh, as the opening verses of chapter 8 describe, responds to fear and doubt: with faithful prayer.

**T – Take it Before the Lord (14).** Notice the imagery as Hezekiah takes the letter he receives (perhaps Sennacherib's message was delivered in written form) and spreads it before the Lord in the house of the Lord. He physically lays his burden before God" (14). Biblical writers tell us "cast all our cares [or burden] upon God" (Ps 55:22; 1 Pet 5:7), and to "let our requests be known to God" (Phil 4:6). Come to God like this: helpless and in need of grace. Why do we not do this? We must admit that at the root of prayerlessness is a feeling of self-sufficiency. If we think we can do things on our own, then why pray? Take a cue from Hezekiah and remember the words of Jesus, "apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

**R – Recognize the Greatness of God (15).** Hezekiah prays with *an elevated view of God*. He recognizes his majestic presence of God who is "enthroned above the cherubim." He affirms the exclusive nature of God who is God "alone." He affirms the total sovereignty of God, who is the God of "all the kingdoms of the earth." And he recognizes the unparalleled power of God, who "made the heavens and the earth." Oh that we had a vision of God like this when we pray! Let us remember Whom it is that we come to in prayer! Is our prayerlessness not also rooted in a low view of God? Let us "ponder anew what the Almighty can do!"

**U – Unload the Problem to God (16-18).** Hezekiah asks God to "incline his ear" and "hear" and to "see" (16). He calls on God to consider the mockery of Sennacherib, who taunts "the living God" (16b). His prayer then includes a "lament" or a description of the situation. He states that Assyria has destroyed other nations, and their gods, but states, "they were not gods" (18). Notice that Hezekiah is not complaining against God; he is taking his complaint to God. He is lamenting the situation, pouring out his heart. Talk out your issue in God's presence. In our crises we get tempted to complain to other people before we pour out our hearts to God. Here is a great example for us. Unload it to the One who can carry it.

**S – Seek the Help of God (19).** His supplication is very simple: "O LORD our God, save us, please from his hand" (19a). You do not have to have big, impressive

words when you pray. Present your request to God (4:6). If you are the Father's child, tell him what you need like a child. Jesus said that God heard the prayer of the tax collector, when he simply said, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" (Luke 18:13).

*T – Treasure the Glory of God (19b).* The purpose of his prayer is also simple but so important: "that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone" (19b, my emphasis). Hezekiah is not just praying for his sake, or the people's sake, but for the sake of God's glory. Davis says, "When we are concerned with God's glory we are likely to be heard" (289). Is this "God-glorify-yourself" not reflected in the opening of the Lord's Prayer? "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name" (Matt 6:9) or "make your name great." Oh that we might be consumed with this desire: the glory of God being made known among the nations!

Do you see how simple prayer is? Hezekiah faces the threat of the Assyrians. Instead of planning, plotting, seeking outside help, he looks to God. Prayer does not eliminate the need for human solutions (for example, Hezekiah had a great solution to get water into the city in 20:20), but our ultimate trust must always be in God alone. Corporately, Christians sometimes look to pastors/leaders instead of to God first. And when they bring their problems to pastors, instead of first seeking the Chief Shepherd, the pastors fail to seek God's help! They take on a messiah complex, instead of taking problems to God. Please do not misunderstand. I think the believers should always seek godly counsel. But nothing should substitute for dependence upon God. Perhaps you should stop and pray this passage in your own words right now.

**God's Response.** In verses 20-37, we notice that God heard his prayer (20), and he will reverse the situation. Isaiah brings God's response to Hezekiah's prayer in three parts.

First, we read of a "mocking song" or "dirge" (21-28). God speaks through the prophet in a poetic way concerning Sennacherib. Tracing the big picture, Sennacherib has spoken to Hezekiah about the Lord; Hezekiah has spoken to God about Sennacherib; Now, God will speak to Hezekiah about Sennacherib (Oswalt, 282). In this dirge, God refers to Israel as a virgin daughter who is being oppressed (21). But everything will change because to mock Israel is to insult God himself (22-24). Then God says that Assyria's "success" has only come because of his sovereign will (25-26; cf., Isa 10:5-19). This statement is intended to humble them. In the last part of the dirge, God promises that Assyria will go home the same way they came. He says, "I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth, and I will turn you back on the way by

which you came" (28). House says, "The reference to the 'hook' and 'bit' reminds the original readers of the Assyrian practice of using these instruments to lead people into exile as if they were animals [cf., Amos 4:1-3]" (370). God will treat them the way they have treated the nations.

Second, the Lord will provide a sign for Hezekiah (29-31). The sign will occur when the Assyrians' leave. It will take two years from the land to be replenished from the Assyrian invasion, but in three years it will be back to normal. Like the crops, a remnant of surviving Israelites will grow up out of Jerusalem (Ibid.). How will this happen? "The zeal of the LORD will do this" (31).

The third response to Hezekiah's prayer is God's specific promise that the Assyrians will not conquer Jerusalem (32-34). God will defend the city for his name sake and for the sake of his servant David (34).

The execution of God's promises is found in the closing verse of the chapter. The angel of the LORD strikes down 185,000 soldiers. God delivers his people. Salvation is of the Lord (Jonah 2:9). Then we read of the fulfillment of 19:7. He returns home, and is put to death by the sword.

Are all gods the same? We hear this question a lot. The Assyrians believed that Yahweh was like the other gods, basically powerless. But God humbled the mockers, and proved otherwise. David expressed what Hezekiah experienced, "There is none like you among the gods" (Ps 86:8).

## **Challenge #2: Illness (20:1-11)**

The writer's report of Hezekiah's illness is probably not in chronological order. House notes that 'In those days' apparently refers to the general period of Hezekiah. His illness must have occurred before the Sennacherib invasion (House, f. 76, 373). Regardless of when it happened, it did occur, and it serves as another case study on faith and prayer.

Hezekiah is sick and told that he will die (1). Will he not live to enjoy the victory over Assyria? Once again, Hezekiah takes his trouble to God in *prayer* (2-3). He appeals to his own personal character in this prayer saying, "O LORD, please remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight" (20:3). Then he "wept bitterly" (3). Some view this petition as self-centered, but Hezekiah is really following a common Israelite pattern of the lament prayers in Psalms. He is praying a lot like David (cf., Ps 7:3-5; 17:1-5; 18:20-

26; 26:1-7; 44:17-22). Davis says, "There is no thought of sinless perfection but only of covenantal obedience" (301).

Isaiah immediately returns to give him a revised word that God has heard, and God will heal the king (4-5). God promises to give him fifteen more years. Did God change his mind? Davis says, "Sometimes what sounds like a final decree is a subtle invitation" (301). See Exodus 32:7-14 as an example. What we should see is that our prayers matter! Interestingly, he will rise on "the third day" (5, 8), becoming a "resurrected" king. Additionally, God says, "I will defend this city for my own sake and for my servant David's sake" (6). God not only heard his prayer and promised healing, but also promised that he would continue to defend the people from the Assyrians. Isaiah then says, "Bring a cake of figs. And let them take and lay it on the boil, that he may recover" (7). In this example, we see that God may choose to work his healing through human means.

We read next that Hezekiah asked for a sign of healing (Unlike his father Ahaz, who rejected Isaiah's sign in Isaiah 7:12). The prophet gives him a choice of signs: "This shall be the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that he has promised: shall the shadow go forward ten steps, or go back ten steps?" (9). Hezekiah takes the more difficult sign, "Let it go back to steps" (10). Thus, "His healing takes on miraculous proportions... He lives under God's blessing, while Sennacherib lives under God's judgment" (House).

God does not always heal us when we pray, but sometimes he does. Regardless of the outcome, we should trust in God with our lives. Hezekiah shows us a good example of crying out to God when we are sick (cf., James 5:13a, 14).

### **Challenge #3: Pride (20:12-21)**

Once again we have another interaction between Isaiah and Hezekiah. We might call his final challenge the challenge of "pride." Like other kings before him, Hezekiah became his own greatest problem. He gets puffed up with his success and his stuff, and in his pride, he looks to the Babylonians instead of to God for help.

It is often easier to look to God in suffering than in prosperity. When things are going well, we often lose sight of our dependency upon God. As a church, it is easy to get puffed up with big numbers or "success" and start trusting in yourself instead of God for advancing the kingdom. As a nation, prosperity, often crushes dependency. How quickly we can forget the giver of gifts. As individuals, it is easy to turn into Hezekiah,

failing to crush pride and cultivate humility. But we must remember that "pride goes before a fall." (Prov 16:18)

So here is what happens. Hezekiah has company over. The Babylonians pay him a visit, bringing him a present, for the king's son "heard that he was sick" but also to bring "letters" (12; Isa 39:1-ff). These letters probably had something to do with a hidden agenda (Motyer, in Davis, 305). When we read that Hezekiah showed the Babylonians everything (13-15), welcoming them "gladly," (Isa 39:2), he is doing more than giving them a tour. He is showing them his resources, and discussing an alliance against Assyria. Motyer captures what might have been going on in Hezekiah's heart, "Imagine them coming all that way to see me! Imagine Moerodach-Baladin wanting me as an ally!" (Tyndale, 24). Isaiah knows this it is not acceptable for the king to seek such an alliance (Isa 30:1-5; 31:1-3). He takes the opportunity to tell the king about the future (16-18). He tells him that that one day Babylon will take everything in the palace; some of his sons will be eunuchs and will be in the palace of the Babylonians. We have the privilege position of knowing that this will not happen for over a century, but Isaiah's word will be fulfilled.

What is the problem? The chronicler says, "God left him [Hezekiah] to himself, in order to test him to know all that was in his heart" (31). If this event was intended to test him, then the test had to do with *pride*, especially given his earlier problems with pride (see 2 Chron 32:25-25) (House, 375). Hezekiah was flattered by their interest in him, and thrilled by a possible alliance, but all of it was idolatrous, and arrogant. What happened to his humble trust in Yahweh to fight the enemies? We have another Uzziah-like example, "But when he was strong, he grew proud" (2 Chron 26:16). Let us remember that "no matter our age or vocation, humility is our greatest friend and pride our greatest enemy" (Mahaney, 14).

Hezekiah responds strangely, "'The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good.' For he thought, 'Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days'" (19). Either this is a self-serving and unrepentant response, meaning that he does not care about the future, just his own day; or he sees this as a "good" word because God is delaying his judgment in his grace (Davis, 306). I prefer to take the former position, given the problem of pride in the story.

**Remember that Ultimate Restoration is Coming (20:20-22)**

The end of Hezekiah's life reminds us the challenge of consistency. It reminds me of the 2009-2010 Kentucky Wildcats basketball team. They dominated the regular season, losing only two games, but did not reach the Final Four. Their amazing season ended with a "clang," as they shot 4-32 from the three-point line, including missing their first twenty three-point attempts. They go down as an impressive team that fell short of glory.

As we close the books on Hezekiah's tremendous season as king, we recognized that his reign ended with a "clang." He could not bring ultimate restoration. Judah's exile is coming. The writer tells us that he accomplished a lot, but he died, and Manasseh reigned in his place (22). He will lead Judah like Ahaz, and soon Judah will be in captivity.

The best of kings fall short of glory. Only One King can bring true restoration: Jesus. As we finish this section, we recognize the absolute importance of worshipping the living God, and trusting in the living God; but that happens through our union with the Son of God. Jesus is the King of Kings. Hezekiah was like David, but he was not the David that was to come. Jesus alone is the king who lived a perfectly consistent life, who died for idolaters, taking their judgment, and rising on the third day to give them life in his eternal kingdom. Let us rejoice in our King.