



kiah's religious reforms, 2 Chronicles says that "he opened the doors of the house of the LORD and repaired them" (29:3b).<sup>2</sup> He required the priests and the Levites to consecrate themselves so that they might cleanse the temple (29:5–19). He offered sacrifices, initiated a great worship service in the temple, and asked the people to bring sacrifices to God (29:20–36). Then he held a great Passover and not only urged all the people of Judah to come, but also invited Israelites from the northern tribes (most of whom refused the invitation; 30:10). Further, Hezekiah reorganized the "divisions of the priests and the Levites" (31:2) and made provisions for their continued support (31:3–19). "He did what was good, right and true before the LORD his God. Every work which he began . . . , seeking his God, he did with all his heart and prospered" (31:20b, 21).

Three things are noteworthy about Hezekiah's religious reforms:

1. *The importance of the reforms.* If the Jews had been allowed to continue on the path they were traveling, the people might have continued to exist; but they would not have been God's people, worshiping Him alone according to His directions. The Messiah could not have come into the world through such a people.

2. *The basis for the reforms.* Before Hezekiah began his reforms, the religion of Judah was corrupt because it did not measure up to the religion God had instituted in the law of Moses. Therefore, the Law became the basis for Hezekiah's reforms. His aim was to bring God's people back to the commands given through Moses.

3. *The short-lived nature of the reforms.* Hezekiah was succeeded by his wicked son Manasseh, and the reforms he instituted died with him. Judah soon became just as wicked as it had been. The people as a whole had been so corrupted by earlier monarchs that Hezekiah's attempts at reformation fell on deaf ears and hardened hearts.

However, we want to notice Hezekiah's approach to leadership and reform. When he encountered a people engaged in corrupt religious practices, he trusted God to provide answers to the problem by using God's Word as the pattern for Judah's religion.

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<sup>2</sup>It was necessary for Hezekiah to open "the doors of the house of the LORD" because his predecessor, Ahaz, had closed them (2 Chronicles 28:24).

## Message for Today

Hezekiah's reforms have this message for us: When religion is corrupt, it needs to be reformed! The source of that reformation must be God's law—not, in these days, the law of Moses, but Christ's New Testament! We, like Hezekiah, are to trust in God by looking to His words for answers to religious apostasy. However, reforming our religious practices cannot please God if our hearts are not right with Him! Religious renewal begins in the heart!

## THE NATIONAL CRISIS

When Hezekiah came to the throne, he experienced not only a religious crisis but also a national crisis. The nation was in a precarious military position.

### The Assyrian Threat

For three years, Shalmaneser V, the king of Assyria, besieged Samaria, and then Sargon II carried Israel into exile in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 18:9–11). The southern kingdom was likewise subject to Assyrian domination. During his reign, Hezekiah "rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him" (18:7; see 18:20<sup>3</sup>). Subsequently, Hezekiah expanded his influence by conquering the territory of the Philistines (18:8). As a result, the next Assyrian king, Sennacherib, invaded Judah and threatened Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:13). Hezekiah sent him a message, confessing, "I have done wrong," with an offer to pay tribute to Sennacherib if he would withdraw (18:14). Even though Sennacherib accepted Hezekiah's tribute (18:14–16), the payment did not satisfy the Assyrian monarch;<sup>4</sup> so he sent officials, including "the

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<sup>3</sup>Perhaps Assyria viewed Hezekiah's religious reforms, especially his invitation to the northern tribes to join in a Passover in Jerusalem, as an attempt to revive Jewish nationalism and as equivalent to a declaration of Jewish independence. According to 2 Chronicles 32:1–8, Hezekiah had refortified the city and enlarged his army as well.

<sup>4</sup>"Some scholars, facing the difficulty of harmonizing the two aspects of the battle [that Hezekiah paid tribute and that Sennacherib still attacked Jerusalem], suggest that the author of II Kings has telescoped the accounts of two campaigns, one in 701 B.C., also documented in the Annals of Sennacherib, and a second sometime later, perhaps about 688 B.C." (Charles F. Pfeiffer, *Old Testament History* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1973], 368). This same view is given in John Bright, "Excursus I: The Problem of Sennacherib's Campaigns in Palestine," *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), 282–87.

Rabshakeh,<sup>5</sup> to urge the people of Jerusalem to surrender to the king.

The Rabshakeh then, in one of the best examples of persuasive speech found in the Bible, urged the people of Jerusalem to surrender to the king of Assyria. He said that the Jews had no reason to hope for deliverance. He said they could not put their trust in Egypt (18:21); nor could they trust in God, for Hezekiah had destroyed the high places where the people worshiped Him (18:22). Further, he explained that they could not trust in their own forces, since they had virtually no warriors (18:23, 24a). He even said that God had told the Assyrians to come up against Judah (18:25). Those who were listening asked him to address them in Aramaic, but he insisted on speaking in Hebrew so he could be understood by the Jews on the walls of the city (18:26, 27). He shouted to the people that they should not expect deliverance from Hezekiah but that, if they would surrender to the Assyrian king, Sennacherib would treat them well and eventually take them away to a good land (18:28–31). Again, he urged the people of Jerusalem not to trust in their God, saying that none of the other gods had been able to deliver their people out of the hand of Assyria, so God would not be able to deliver Jerusalem (18:33–35).<sup>6</sup>

### Hezekiah's Reaction and God's Response

After hearing that message, Hezekiah was understandably upset. "He tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth and entered the house of the LORD" (2 Kings 19:1). In his extreme distress, fearing the destruction of his kingdom, he turned to God. He sent Eliakim, who was over the household, with Shebna the scribe and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth (19:2), to deliver this message to the prophet Isaiah:

This day is a day of distress, rebuke, and rejection: for children have come to birth and there is no strength to deliver. Perhaps the LORD your God will hear all the words of Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to re-

proach the living God, and will rebuke the words which the LORD your God has heard. Therefore, offer a prayer for the remnant that is left (19:3, 4).

Isaiah responded with a message from God. Because Assyria had blasphemed His name, God would cause the king of Assyria to return to his own land, where he would "fall by the sword" (2 Kings 19:6, 7).

We are told that Hezekiah received another threatening message (19:8–13). The king took the letter containing Assyria's threats, "spread it out before the LORD" (19:14), and prayed fervently to God for deliverance (19:15–19). God answered Hezekiah through a message to Isaiah. This message predicted that Judah would survive (19:20–31). The king of Assyria would "not come to [Jerusalem] or shoot an arrow there"; nor would he besiege the city, but would return by the way he came (19:32–34). God fulfilled His promise that night by killing 185,000 men of the Assyrian army (19:35). Consequently, Sennacherib went home defeated. Soon afterward he was assassinated by his own sons (see 19:36, 37). Hezekiah trusted in God, and God delivered the nation!

### Message for Today

Hezekiah's response to Assyria's threats illustrates several precepts that remain applicable. (1) Those who attack God's people are really attacking God Himself, and He will hold them accountable. (2) In national crises, a nation should seek God's help. Of course, no nation on earth today is the equivalent of Old Testament Israel. The best application of Israel's appeal to God is to say that *the church* must seek God's help in times of trouble. (3) Perhaps the most important truth to remember is that no one can defeat God: 185,000 soldiers are no match for God! When we face great odds, we need to hear Hezekiah's words:

Be strong and courageous, do not fear or be dismayed because of the king of Assyria nor because of all the horde that is with him; for the one with us is greater than the one with him. With him is only an arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God to help us and to fight our battles (2 Chronicles 32:7, 8a).

Similarly, Paul said, "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Romans 8:31b).

<sup>5</sup>"Rabshakeh" is a title, not a personal name.

<sup>6</sup>The persuasiveness of the Rabshakeh's speech should remind us that rhetoric (the art of persuasion) and logic can be used for evil purposes as well as for good causes. We need to be aware that an argument which sounds persuasive is not necessarily true; it may be based on false assumptions. Liars can sound very persuasive.



## THE PERSONAL CRISIS

One more crisis in the life of Hezekiah is recorded in 2 Kings. This incident was a very personal crisis: “In those days Hezekiah became mortally ill. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live”’” (2 Kings 20:1). Hezekiah responded as we might have:

Then he turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, saying, “Remember now, O LORD, I beseech You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a whole heart and have done what is good in Your sight.” And [the text continues] Hezekiah wept bitterly (2 Kings 20:2, 3).

As was his custom, when he faced a crisis, Hezekiah turned to God, trusting Him to take care of the problem.

In the case of his illness, God heard Hezekiah’s prayer. He gave Isaiah a message to relay to the king:

I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD. I will add fifteen years to your life, and I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake and for My servant David’s sake (20:5, 6).

Hezekiah asked for a sign that he would be healed, and God said that the sign would be that the shadow would go backward ten steps (20:8–11).<sup>7</sup> In keeping with Isaiah’s directions, a cake of figs was put on Hezekiah’s boil, and he recovered (20:7). Hezekiah placed his faith in God; he prayed, and God heard his prayer!

### Message for Today

What should we learn from Hezekiah’s sickness and prayer? Perhaps this lesson is the easiest to learn: When we are in distress—when we are sick, have problems, or face personal crises—those who believe in God almost inevitably turn

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<sup>7</sup>The movement of the shadow was apparently a way of telling time. Some have thought it was the shadow on a sundial; others believe that, as the NASB suggests, the shadow on a staircase was used to tell time. For the shadow to go backward instead of forward would have been a miracle. It was almost certainly a localized miracle. (R. D. Patterson and Hermann J. Austel, “1, 2 Kings,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, *1 Kings—Job* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988], 274.)

to Him. Like Hezekiah, we cry out to Him for help, protesting that we have tried to do God’s will. Further, we can believe that God hears and answers our prayers, just as God answered Hezekiah’s prayer. We do not see miracles performed today, nor does God speak to us directly or through inspired prophets as He did to Hezekiah. Still, He wants us to pray, and He answers our prayers. God added fifteen years to Hezekiah’s life because of his prayer. It is possible that God has added years to our lives as well because of our prayers.

Two other observations should be added. (1) Hezekiah’s prayer was answered because Hezekiah had trusted in God and obeyed Him consistently throughout his life. Those who have not surrendered their lives to God and who have not sought to do His will cannot expect to have their prayers answered by God. (2) While God answers our prayers, He does not always answer affirmatively. Sometimes He answers by saying, “No.” When He declines our requests, the negative answer is most likely better for us and for His cause.

In fact, Hezekiah’s answered prayer may provide an illustration of that truth. When Hezekiah died, his son Manasseh became king. Manasseh was only twelve when he became king. Therefore, he was born during the fifteen years that God added to Hezekiah’s life. If Hezekiah had died from his illness, Manasseh would never have been born. Manasseh had an opportunity to make a difference in the life of Judah. He failed to be righteous during the first part of his life, sealing Judah’s destruction, even though he returned to God in his final years.

## CONCLUSION

Hezekiah put his faith in God and did God’s will, obeying the Law; and the result was that God blessed him. The author of 2 Kings wrote, “And the LORD was with him; wherever he went he prospered” (2 Kings 18:7a; see also 18:8; 2 Chronicles 32:27–30). Let us learn from Hezekiah to trust God completely, seeking to do His will in everything. Whatever struggles we face, we should turn to God and rely on Him. In the end, He will bless us abundantly.

We can learn something else from Hezekiah’s story. Prosperity seems to have contributed to a mistake that Hezekiah made. After his recovery

from his sickness, Hezekiah received envoys who brought congratulations from the Babylonian king Merodach-baladan. While they were visiting with him, Hezekiah showed them all the treasures in his house (2 Kings 20:12, 13). The prophet Isaiah reproached him for what he had done and announced,

“Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and all that your fathers have laid up in store to this day will be carried to Babylon [the place from which the envoys had come]; nothing shall be left. . . . Some of your sons . . . will be taken away” (20:16–18a).

Hezekiah was pleased with this response and said to Isaiah, “. . . ‘The word of the LORD which you have spoken is good.’ For he thought, ‘Is it not so, if there will be peace and truth in my days?’” (2 Kings 20:19). Hezekiah’s cavalier attitude is not commendable; we need to be concerned not only about what will happen to us, but also about what will happen to generations to come. However, we mainly want to notice that

Hezekiah’s displaying his wealth to the Babylonians was, to say the least, unwise. This action seems to be connected to Hezekiah’s pride (2 Chronicles 32:25–26).

We should not be surprised that the king’s heart became proud; he had obeyed God, and God had blessed him abundantly. His desire to show off his riches may seem understandable. The message for us in Hezekiah’s story is this: We must trust in God and believe that we will be blessed as a result (not necessarily with material riches), but we must never become proud or arrogant because of how God has blessed us. Instead, we should remain humble, realizing that even after we have done all that God wants us to do, we are still “unworthy slaves” (Luke 17:10).

Finally, each of us should ask, “Am I, like Hezekiah, following God and keeping His commandments?” If you find that you are not, then you need to make your life right with God.

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