

Heroic Hezekiah

By David Feddes

(2 Kings 18-20, 2 Chronicles 29-32, Isaiah 36-39)

One of the great figures in the book of Second Kings and elsewhere in the Bible is Hezekiah. He was one of the finest, bravest, godliest kings of all the kings of Israel and Judah. There were a lot of bad ones, but Hezekiah was one of the best, and I want to focus on Heroic Hezekiah in this talk. Before we get into the details, I just want to highlight major events of Hezekiah's life in chronological order, in the order in which they actually happened.

Major events in chronological order

- Grows up the son of wicked Ahaz
- Leads spiritual revival and return to God
- Gets deadly illness, then 15 extra years
- Shows off, is rebuked, and selfishly feels relieved that at least he'll be secure
- 701 BC Heroically resists Assyria and trusts God when threatened by a mighty enemy

First of all, Hezekiah grew up the son of a very wicked king, King Ahaz. Then he led a great spiritual revival and helped the nation of Judah to return to God. Then he got a deadly illness, in which he was told he was going to die. But then God granted him 15 extra years of life. After his recovery, he showed off to some envoys from Babylon, showed them his treasures, and God rebuked him through the prophet Isaiah. Hezekiah, at least at first, selfishly felt relieved that at least he'd be secure in his lifetime, because the Babylonian invasion that was prophesied wouldn't come till a lot later. And then, in 701 BC, he led heroic resistance to the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, and his vast armies. He trusted in God when he was threatened by a mighty enemy. That's the order in which these things actually happened.

If you were to read in Second Kings, you would not find them listed in that order. You'd find that it speaks of him growing up the son of wicked Ahaz, leading a spiritual revival, then resisting Assyria. And then after that, you read about the deadly illness, and the showing off to the envoys of Babylon. When you read it in that order, you might think, "Well, Hezekiah had his finest hour and then he kind of went downhill toward the end of his life when he got to be too proud and showed off."

But when Israelites were reading the story, they knew the order in which it had happened. Think back to the books of Samuel. It tells about the events of David's life and various things, and then all of a sudden at the end, they tack on about three chapters of stuff that David and his mighty men did which weren't part of the main plot. And they're tacked on at the end, not because they happen at the end, but because they're put there in an appendix. If you read the book of Judges, you read about various judges in the order of things that happened, and then from chapters 17 through 21 of Judges, it goes back and tells some different incidents that happened throughout that period. You get the same thing with Hezekiah. It's not all in the order in which it happened. It follows the main plot line of the book the way the story unfolds, and then throws in a couple of additional stories about Hezekiah. But we know from other chronicling and events that this is the order in which they happened. And I think it's important to know this order in which they

happened, that Hezekiah did have his flaws, but even those flaws were exposed, and he repented of them. And the last things that we know about his life were actually wonderful things about tremendous faith and maturity in the Lord.

Hezekiah's father

He started out as the son of a very wicked man. His father Ahaz "walked in the way of the kings of Israel. He even burned his son as an offering" (2 Kings 16:3). Obviously, that son wasn't Hezekiah. But he burned one of his sons as an offering to one of those idols, and he sacrificed and made offerings on the high places. Ahaz needed some help when he was threatened by some near neighbors who weren't really strong. But he still wanted help. So, he sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, saying, "I'm your servant and your son. Come and rescue me." It worked. The Assyrians, who were the most powerful force in the world at that time, came and wiped out Ahaz's enemies. They wiped out the nation of Israel (the ten northern tribes), they wiped out the nation of Aram, or what today is called Syria. So, Ahaz's opponents have been wiped out, but he had invited a monster into the neighborhood, and he had more trouble than he had bargained for. This Assyrian army would be back under King Sennacherib in Hezekiah's time to haunt them again.

When King Ahaz, this wicked king, went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, he saw the altar that was at Damascus, the altar of a defeated king. But he's going to copy it and put it in the temple. King Ahaz sent to Uriah the priest a model of the altar, and the bronze altar that was before the Lord he removed from the front of the house. So, he replaced—right in God's own temple—God's altar with an altar designed to serve a pagan god. That's the kind of man who was the father of good king Hezekiah.

"In the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, Hezekiah son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign. He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. His mother's name was Abijah daughter of Zechariah. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father David had done" (2 Kings 18:1–3).

Notice that it says "his father David." Just a few verses before, it's been talking about Ahaz, his father. A lot of us have a choice about who our real spiritual father is. Sometimes we have a father who's no good at all. As the apostle Peter once wrote, "You were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers" (1 Peter 1:18). If there has not been any godliness and Christianity in your family background, you can make a new beginning and be different. But there may be others who have had some godly ancestors, maybe even people they knew about and found out about, but their own parents have been wicked. That's no excuse for them to be wicked. Hezekiah chose to act like David his father, who was really his great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather from almost 300 years before. He chose to act like David, the original good king of Judah, and not like his own biological father Ahaz. He was also a descendant of David, but he was also a spiritual descendant of David.

Spiritual revival

“He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. (It was called Nehushtan.) Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him” (2 Kings 18:4–5). That's quite a statement. There was no king after him or before him who served and trusted God quite the way that Hezekiah did.

Notice that he not only dealt with the pagan idols, but even dealt with something that originally had a good purpose but had become an idol. Moses had been instructed by God himself to make a bronze serpent and lift it up so that people who had been snake-bitten because of their sin could look at that bronze snake and receive life and healing (Numbers 21:8–9). And it worked. God gave life to all those in the wilderness who looked at that snake after they'd been snake-bitten during that terrible event. But that symbol of God's grace and forgiveness had become an idol. It wasn't any longer just a sign calling people to trust God. They were starting to worship it as a god with magical or godlike powers of its own. So, what did Hezekiah do? He smashed it.

People can do the same thing still today. The cross of Jesus is a wonderful thing because it brought salvation to the world. But then people take physical crosses and start adoring those crosses, hanging them on their wall, or using the sign of the cross as some sort of superstition to help them get lucky at football games or what have you. Well, then it's becoming a Nehushtan—hunk of bronze—just a chunk of junk that you shouldn't be worshipping. So, there are symbols that may even once have been good that can go bad. Hezekiah recognized that about this bronze serpent, and he destroyed it.

He renewed temple worship. Remember, his father had moved pagan stuff right into the Holy Temple of God himself. But in the very first year of Hezekiah's reign—in the first month—notice, the first year, the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them. He brought in the priests and the Levites and assembled them in the square on the east and said to them, “Hear me, Levites. Now consecrate yourselves and consecrate the house of the Lord, the God of your fathers, and carry out the filth from the Holy Place.” He gets together these priests and temple attendants and he says it's time to carry out that garbage and clean house. And so, they did. They carried out all those idols and all that junk that had been cluttering the temple of the Holy God. Hezekiah said, “Now it's in my heart to make a covenant with the Lord, the God of Israel, in order that his fierce anger may turn away from us” (2 Chronicles 29:3–10).

This brought about this cleansing of the temple and also brought about a revival in worship. “Hezekiah the king and the officials commanded the Levites to sing praises to the Lord with the words of David and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed down and worshiped... Thus the service of the house of the Lord was restored. And Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced because God had provided for the people, for the thing came about suddenly” (2 Chronicles 29:3-10).

Notice what happens when God gets a hold of one man willing to repent, to turn away from the wicked ways of his father, to stand up for what's right, to call other people to serve the Lord. God brought about revival. God can revive his church in an amazing way, and sometimes it starts with just one man who's lit on fire by the Holy Spirit with a desire for holiness and truth. God can change nations and bring nationwide revivals where people come flocking to him in repentance and renewed faith and seeking the Lord. Hezekiah was blessed to have God's hand on him. God had done it, and the thing came about suddenly.

When this happened, it was shortly after the king of Assyria had come and carried off the ten tribes of Israel. Remember how Hezekiah's father had invited the Assyrians into that neighborhood of the world? Well, they came, all right. They wiped out the ten tribes of Israel and carried them off into foreign lands and left only a few behind. But there were a few left behind, and the others that were scattered among the nations. And Hezekiah, being conscious of God's promises for all of Israel and his faithfulness, sent out an invitation not just to the kingdom of Judah that he was still in charge of, but to people who were scattered around from the ten tribes. He said:

“O people of Israel, return to the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, that he may turn again to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria... For if you return to the Lord, your brothers and your children will find compassion with their captors and return to this land. For the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you if you return to him.”

So, the couriers went from city to city throughout the country of Ephraim and Manasseh and as far as Zebulun, but they laughed them to scorn and mocked them. Well, that wasn't very encouraging—but not everybody. However, some men of Asher, of Manasseh, and of Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the Word of the Lord. (2 Chronicles 30:6–12).

Just a quick note: Anna, that aged woman who welcomed Jesus at the temple and blessed him and prophesied about him—Anna was a woman from the tribe of Asher. So even all those centuries later, the ten lost tribes weren't quite lost. Some of them had come back and kept their identity. A big part of it was Hezekiah's invitation to the scattered people to come back to the land of Judah and to worship God in his holy temple.

The result of the revival under Hezekiah was tremendous joy:

The whole assembly of Judah and the priests and the Levites and the whole assembly that came out of Israel and the sojourners who came out of the land of Israel, and the sojourners who lived in Judah, rejoiced. So there was great joy in Jerusalem. For since the time of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel, there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem. Then the priests and the Levites arose and blessed the people, and their voice was heard, and their prayer came to God's holy habitation in heaven (2 Chronicles 30:25–27).

What a beautiful revival among God's people, led by that man Hezekiah, whose heart God filled to bring these things about. Though the son of an ungodly king, he led a great spiritual revival.

Fifteen extra years to live

In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. 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. You shall not recover.” Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, saying, “Now, 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.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly (2 Kings 20:1–3).

Hezekiah is crying out when he hears this grim news from Isaiah that he's not going to live, that the illness is going to kill him. And he says, “Lord, I deserve better than this! Haven't you noticed what I've been doing for you?” Now, you'll notice a bit of a problem here: he's appealing to his own deserving. His prayer is imperfect. It's self-pitying, maybe a little bit self-righteous. But God hears.

And before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the Lord came to him: “Turn back, and say to Hezekiah the leader of my people, Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father: 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, and I will add fifteen years to your life. I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city for my own sake and for my servant David's sake.” (1 Kings 20:4-6)

So God promises not only to heal Hezekiah from the illness that immediately affects his life and threatens his life, but also to rescue his people from the Assyrian monster. And God gives a sign—a miraculous sign—that he's going to do this. He makes the shadow move backward that day. And so, he gives this miraculous sign that it's going to happen.

Hezekiah, understandably, is excited. He gives God praise and says: “Lord, by such things men live; and in all these is the life of my spirit. Oh, restore me to health and make me live! Behold, it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness; but in love you have delivered my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back” (Isaiah 38:16–17).

Remember how when he first heard the bad news, Hezekiah said, “Lord, I've been good! I deserve better than this.” But after he's healed, he also realizes, “You know what? I have my sins. I didn't deserve better than this, but God cast those sins behind his back.” This healing is by God's grace, not just because Hezekiah thought he deserved it.

So, this is the second great event: first, that tremendous revival that Hezekiah led, and then this wonderful, miraculous healing that God gives him from his illness, and he gives him fifteen more years to live.

Now, if you know you're going to die, and you know pretty much exactly how long you have to live, wouldn't you want to make the best use of those years? Well, the fact is, we all know that

there's a limit to the length of our life. We all know we're going to die, and yet we waste a lot of time and we do a lot of stupid stuff that we really shouldn't do. And Hezekiah didn't always make the best use of the lessons that he learned while he was sick.

Showing off

"During that time, Merodach-Baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent envoys with a letter and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that Hezekiah had been sick. Hezekiah welcomed them, and he showed them all his treasure house—the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his armory—all that was found in his storehouses. There was nothing in his house, or in all his realm, that Hezekiah did not show them" (2 Kings 20:12-13). He just couldn't resist. God had blessed him. God had prospered his realm, and he had to show off. But it is not the best idea in the world that when pirates come to town, you show them all your treasure. And that's what Hezekiah did.

The Babylonians weren't yet the most powerful country in the world. They weren't yet the greatest empire; the Assyrians were. And the Babylonians were facing some heavy pressure from Assyria. But a time was coming when Babylon would rise to the top, and their rulers were taking notes. They were happy to know where the treasure was.

God sent Isaiah with the message. Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the Lord: 'Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up until this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left,' says the Lord" (2 Kings 20:16–17). Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "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?" (2 Kings 20:19). Well now, that's not the most flattering picture of Hezekiah, is it? "Oh, well, it's not going to happen to me, so good." Not a very noble sentiment. He found out that he was a self-centered man.

"Hezekiah prospered in all his works. And so in the matter of the envoys of the princes of Babylon, who had been sent to him to inquire about the sign that had been done in the land, God left him to himself, in order to test him and to know all that was in his heart" (2 Chronicles 32:30-31). God had these envoys come.

You see how testing can bring heart problems out into the open? When Hezekiah had his illness, that test of hardship and difficulty and impending death showed that there was some self-pity in Hezekiah and some self-righteousness. And when the opposite happened, when he was healed, when there was prosperity and wealth all around, and when admirers from a foreign country came to find out what was going on, pride and self-promotion came to the surface. "Oh, look at all my treasure! Aren't I great? I'm a fabulous king!" Then, even after he heard the bad news, his attitude was self-protection. When when he was told, "Babylon in a later time is going to come and carry all this treasure away!" Hezekiah responded, "Whew! Good thing it's not in my time!" Self was still at the center of things.

The Lord arranges the events of our life just as much for us as he did for Hezekiah. You might think you're pretty hot stuff, you might think you're pretty good. But then hardship comes. All of a sudden that faith you thought was so strong is devastated and weak. It seems like it's almost

gone. And you start feeling sorry for yourself and you start feeling, “Oh, why me? I deserve better than this.”

There's another way of testing, too. Sometimes you've been following the Lord and you've been faithful to him. But then you get prosperous, and things go well, and people admire you. This can happen in ministry. For a while, you didn't think you were much, you weren't that hot of a speaker, you didn't know that much, but God blessed you anyway. He made great things happen in other people's lives in the church. And after a while, you think to yourself, “I'm quite a guy. I have got talent. I am a success in life.” Success is a test of your heart. And when the pride comes out in the self-promotion and looking out for yourself, then you've discovered things about yourself, and it's a mercy of God that he brings those things out. And we need to pay attention when he does, because when we discover these disgusting and evil and self-centered things in ourselves, God wants to root them out.

“In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. He prayed to the Lord, who answered him and gave him a miraculous sign. But Hezekiah's heart was proud and he did not respond to the kindness shown him; therefore the Lord's wrath was on him and on Judah and Jerusalem. Then Hezekiah repented of the pride of his heart, as did the people of Jerusalem; therefore the Lord's wrath did not come on them during the days of Hezekiah” (2 Chronicles 32:24–26).

Hezekiah's initial reaction was, “Oh good, at least it's not going to happen in our time.” But then he realized that his heart was selfish and sinful, and he humbled himself for the pride of his heart. And the people of Jerusalem humbled themselves too. So, God turned aside his wrath.

We've seen that Hezekiah grew up the son of a wicked king, that he led a great spiritual revival and return to God, that he got a deadly illness and then got fifteen extra years as a gift from God's grace, that he showed off, was rebuked by the prophet Isaiah, and selfishly felt relieved that he'd be secure but then humbled himself.

Resisted mighty enemy

The final great thing about Hezekiah's life that we're told in the Scripture, at least in the chronological events of how it happened, is that in 701 BC there was a terrible invasion and Hezekiah heroically resisted the Assyrian king Sennacherib and all his mighty armies. Hezekiah trusted in God when he was threatened by this mighty enemy.

Remember, Hezekiah's father, Ahaz, had invited the kings of Assyria into the neighborhood to settle some disputes. In doing so, he had invited the monster. He had invited Godzilla. And now Sennacherib, the king of the Assyrians, came to seize Judah and Jerusalem as well. Sennacherib was the most powerful man in the world, and he was a ruthless bully.

“In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. So Hezekiah king of Judah sent this message to the king of Assyria at Lachish: ‘I have done wrong. Withdraw from me, and I will pay whatever you

demand of me.’ The king of Assyria exacted from Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold” (2 Kings 18:13–14).

Well, Hezekiah scraped together that vast pile of wealth and sent it over to the king of Assyria, and it did no good. You just can't buy off a bully. He always wants more. And this king did.

Assyria was a the superpower of that time. It had crushed kingdoms such as Sepharvaim, Hamath, Arpad, Hena, and Ivvah. It had crushed Samaria and the ten tribes of Israel, of which Samaria was the capital. It had crushed Aram, or Syria, and its capital Damascus. It had even managed to destroy Babylon for a time—had taken the city and burned it, as is shown in that particular picture of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, supervising the burning of Babylon. He's got a terrifying and successful track record as a conqueror.

Hezekiah, knowing that he can't buy him off, gets ready for attack. He has the walls of Jerusalem rebuilt and repaired, and he sets up another set of walls inside. He has his people manufacturing shields and swords and spears as fast as they can crank them out. And he does another thing. There was a spring outside the walls of Jerusalem. And Hezekiah says, “Why would we want an invading army to have nice, fresh drinking water when they show up to besiege the city?” So they cover over those springs and they dig a tunnel—an amazing achievement of engineering—that leads from inside the walls of the city out to that hidden spring. They started this tunnel at opposite ends, cut through hundreds and hundreds of feet of solid rock, and met in the middle. I've been in that tunnel of Hezekiah where there's still water today.

Hezekiah was a man who trusted God and also took action. And as a wise and trusting king he said, “Okay, I'm trusting God to save us, and God is counting on me to use everything I can and all of my wisdom as a king to help bring it about: build the walls higher and stronger, get the water supply so we've got permanent water in the city and aren't making it easy for the king of Assyria, and arm ourselves to the teeth, and then wait and pray.” Because even with all of that, there is no hope against the power of Assyria.

Hezekiah set command combat commanders over the people and gathered them together to him in the square at the gate of the city and spoke encouragingly to them, saying, “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria, and all the horde that is with him. For there are more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles.” And the people took confidence from the words of Hezekiah, king of Judah (2 Chronicles 32:6–8).

This was a monster army coming at them, and Judah had far fewer troops. Even so, Hezekiah said, “There are more with us than with him.” As it says in the Scriptures, “The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands” (Psalm 68:17).

Remember the story of Elisha when he was trapped in a town with his servant, surrounded by a huge army. The servant was in a panic. Elisha said, “Lord, open his eyes.” And he said to the servant, “Don't be afraid; there are more with us than with them.” Then the Lord opened his eyes and showed him the chariots and horses of fire surrounding the town. Hezekiah remembers that story, and he believes it for his own time: “There are more on our side than on their side.”

Lies and intimidation

The Assyrian king sends one of his officials, the Rabshakeh, with a message: “Say to Hezekiah, ‘Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: On what do you rest this trust of yours? If you say to me, “We trust in the Lord our God,” is it not he whose high places and altars Hezekiah has removed? Moreover, is it without the Lord that I’ve come up against this place to destroy it? The Lord said to me, “Go up against this land and destroy it”’” (2 Kings 18:19–25).

Notice the lies. Hezekiah removes the false idols and the wrong ways of worshiping God, and he's charged with turning God against him. The enemy says, “God wants me to wipe you out.” Well, Satan will send a lot of lies our way about how God wants to wipe us out and destroy us. He'll send us lies that in obeying the Bible we've somehow done something wrong. But Satan is a liar, and the father of lies. In this case, the Rabshakeh is telling the lies. But there's one thing you can't do when somebody is lying to you and is trying to destroy your spirit: don't agree with him. Don't believe him. Believe the promises of God and the protection of God.

This Assyrian official says, “Hey, I'll give you a thousand horses. My master's got so big an army we could just loan you a bunch of horses if you want and see if you can beat us. You can't.” The chief officials of Judah say, “Don't speak in the language of the ordinary people. Just speak in the language of diplomats so we can hear you.” The official retorts, “Has my master sent me to speak these words to your master and you, and not to the men sitting on the wall, who are doomed with you to eat their own dung and drink their own urine?”

Just a few moments earlier, this guy had been saying, “Hey, the king of Assyria—it's great to be part of his empire. He's going to treat you well. You'll have everything good. They'll take you off to a land that's even better than the one you're in now. Oh, it's fabulous!” That's how the enemy will often behave.

Satan, the enemy of our souls, will do the same thing. He'll offer bribes. He'll say, “Oh, it would be so much better if you just let me take over. Let me handle everything. I'll make your life wonderful.” But if there's resistance, the tune suddenly changes: “All right, you're doomed. Eat your own dung and drink your own urine.” First come the bribes and promises, and when that doesn't work, then the attempts to intimidate and to scare the daylights out of you.

Greater than God?

“Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria. Thus says the king: ‘Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you out of my hand. Do not let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord by saying, “The Lord will surely deliver us, and this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.” Has any of the gods of the nations ever delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria?’” (2 Kings 18:28–33). Notice again the forked tongue. Earlier he was saying, “You've offended the Lord! The Lord sent me to do this!” But now he's saying, “Ah, who's the Lord anyway? No god can stop me. I'm the greatest.”

Well, what did God say before any of this ever happened? The prophet Isaiah lived in the time of Hezekiah, and before these events he spoke a prophecy about Assyria. Assyria had been winning

a lot of victories and had been getting very proud. God said, "Shall the axe boast over him who hews with it, or the saw magnify itself against him who wields it? As if a rod should wield him who lifts it, or as if a staff should lift him who is not wood!" (Isaiah 10:15). When you're a tool in somebody's hand, don't brag that you're greater than the one whose hand controls you. If you're Assyria—a tool in God's hand to punish rebellious nations—you better not think that it's because of your own greatness and your own power that you're winning all these victories. "Therefore the Lord, the Lord Almighty, will send a wasting disease upon his sturdy warriors; under his pomp a fire will be kindled like a blazing flame" (Isaiah 10:16). This prophecy is issued before any of these events ever happened.

King Sennacherib has to leave briefly from the siege, but he says, "Don't think that you're going to get away. I'll be back. Do not let the Lord in whom you trust deceive you" (2 Kings 19:10). Before long he comes back and sends this nasty letter: "Behold, you've heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, devoting them to destruction. And shall you be delivered?" (2 Kings 19:11).

What does Hezekiah do? "Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD and spread it before the LORD" (2 Kings 19:14). He said, "Lord God, I've got a little something I'd like to show you. Got this letter today. I don't know what to do with this thing. You're going to have to handle this." He spreads this letter out before God in the temple of God, and he appeals to God.

"And Hezekiah prayed before the Lord and said: 'O Lord, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth. Incline your ear, O Lord, and hear; open your eyes, O Lord, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God. Truly, O Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. Therefore they were destroyed. So now, O Lord our God, save us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O Lord, are God alone'" (2 Kings 19:15–19). He wants God to save Judah as a display to all nations that the living God reigns.

"Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Your prayer to me about Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard... He shall not come into the city, or shoot an arrow there, or come before it with a shield, or cast up a siege mound against it... For I will defend this city to save it for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David'" (2 Kings 19:32,34).

"And that night, the angel of the Lord went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies" (2 Kings 19:35). Hezekiah had said, "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And they didn't really need greater numbers; it took just one angel to wipe out an entire army of 185,000 enemy troops. What a story!

The great poet Lord Byron wrote about the destruction of Sennacherib's army:

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold:
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

Like the leaves of the forest when Summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen:
Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and forever grew still!

And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow and the rust on his mail;
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.

And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord.

Melted like snow at one look from the Lord! That's what happened to the mighty army of King Sennacherib.

“Then Sennacherib king of Assyria withdrew, returned to Nineveh and stayed there. One day, while he was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisrok, his sons Adrammelek and Sharezer killed him with the sword, and they escaped to the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son succeeded him as king” (2 Kings 19:36–37). This terrible tyrant, murderer of countless thousands, conqueror of cities and nations and empires, went to worship his god, and there in the temple of that god his very own sons murdered him. And so ended another enemy of God.

The poet Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote a poem titled *Ozymandias*. He reflects on a statue that lies out in the desert, all smashed and broken.

I met a traveler from an antique land,
Who said—Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,

Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed;

And on the pedestal these words appear:
“My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!”
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

“Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales... All the nations are as nothing before him; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing” (Isaiah 40:15, 17).

So it was with Sennacherib, the tyrant of Assyria, and so it has been with the mighty kings of Babylon, with the great emperors and empires throughout world history. Adolf Hitler, the dictator of Nazi Germany, claimed that his empire was going to last a thousand years. It lasted twelve. They are counted as dust on the scales. God can easily blow that dust away anything he wants. The mightiest rulers are like snowflakes who will melt the moment God's breath blows on them.

“God shall arise, his enemies shall be scattered; and those who hate him shall flee before him. As smoke is driven away, so you shall drive them away; as wax melts before fire, so the wicked shall perish before God. But the righteous shall be glad; they shall rejoice before God; they shall be jubilant with joy! The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands. Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens. Our God is a God who saves!” (Psalm 68:1–3, 17–20). You can imagine Hezekiah and the people of Israel singing from that great Psalm.

Think back to what Hezekiah told his people: “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him, for there are more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles” (2 Chronicles 32:7–8). Hezekiah was a great king in the tradition of his great father David.

But there was an even greater Son of David still to come. And what that Son of David did when he faced his enemies was even more remarkable. Think again of the power of the angels—only one angel wiped out 185,000 troops. When Jesus’ enemies came to capture him, he said, “Do you not think that I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:53). The angels could have wiped out all of Jesus’ enemies in no time. But Jesus went to the cross. He bore the sin that no one else could. He took upon himself the punishment of the whole world.

God has power—God has power to wipe out all of his enemies in an instant. And he has occasionally demonstrated just a little bit of that power, as he did against the Assyrians. But God wants to change many of his enemies into his friends. And so that One who was greater than David, greater than Hezekiah, died to save even enemies. Then he conquered the ultimate enemy—sin and death and Satan—and he rose again from the dead. That was a victory greater than any victory over Sennacherib or anybody else.

Because of Jesus' victory over death, no tyrant or anybody else can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38–39). Jesus said, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). He says that he has overcome the world, and so we can trust in him.

We should read that great historical account of heroic Hezekiah, and rejoice at what God did then, and we should remember that he is still the living God, and that Jesus Christ is the living, resurrected, triumphant Lord.

Heroic Hezekiah

By David Feddes

2 Kings 18-20, 2 Chronicles 29-32, Isaiah 36-39

Major events in chronological order

- *Grows up the son of wicked Ahaz*
- *Leads spiritual revival and return to God*
- *Gets deadly illness, then 15 extra years*
- *Shows off, is rebuked, and selfishly feels relieved that at least he'll be secure*
- *701 BC Heroically resists Assyria and trusts God when threatened by a mighty enemy*

Son of a wicked father

Ahaz walked in the way of the kings of Israel. He even burned his son as an offering... And he sacrificed and made offerings on the high places... Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, "I am your servant and your son. Come up and rescue me... When King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, he saw the altar that was at Damascus. And King Ahaz sent to Uriah the priest a model of the altar... And the bronze altar that was before the Lord he removed from the front of the house. (2 Kings 16)

Acting like David his father, not Ahaz his father

In the third year of Hoshea son of Elah, king of Israel, Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign. He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abi the daughter of Zechariah. And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that David his father had done. (2 Kings 18:1-3)

Destroying idols

He removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah. And he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it (it was called Nehushtan). 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. (2 Kings 18:4-5)

A symbol of God's grace and forgiveness had become an idol. It was no longer a sign calling people to trust God, but had become a god. So Hezekiah smashed it.

Cleansing the temple

In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them. He brought in the priests and the Levites and assembled them in the square on the east and said to them, “Hear me, Levites! Now consecrate yourselves, and consecrate the house of the Lord, the God of your fathers, and carry out the filth from the Holy Place... Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the Lord, the God of Israel, in order that his fierce anger may turn away from us. (2 Chronicles 29:3-10)

Revival in worship

Hezekiah the king and the officials commanded the Levites to sing praises to the Lord with the words of David and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed down and worshiped... Thus the service of the house of the Lord was restored. And Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced because God had provided for the people, for the thing came about suddenly. (2 Chronicles 29:3-10)

Revival means return

“O people of Israel, return to the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, that he may turn again to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria... For if you return to the Lord, your brothers and your children will find compassion with their captors and return to this land. For the Lord your God is gracious and merciful and will not turn away his face from you, if you return to him.” (2 Chronicles 30:6-9)

Revive our heart

So the couriers went from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zebulun, but they laughed them to scorn and mocked them. However, some men of Asher, of Manasseh, and of Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the Lord. (2 Chronicles 30:10-12)

Great joy

The whole assembly of Judah, and the priests and the Levites, and the whole assembly that came out of Israel, and the sojourners who came out of the land of Israel, and the sojourners who lived in Judah, rejoiced. So there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem. Then the priests and the Levites arose and blessed the people, and their voice was heard, and their prayer came to his holy habitation in heaven. (2 Chron 30:25-27)

Deathly sick

In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. 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; you shall not recover.’” Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, saying, “Now, 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.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly. (2 Kings 20:1-3)

Healer and deliverer

And before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the Lord came to him: “Turn back, and say to Hezekiah the leader of my people, Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father: 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, and I will add fifteen years to your life. I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city for my own sake and for my servant David's sake.” (1 Kings 20:4-6)

Praise for healing

Lord, by these things men live, and in all these is the life of my spirit. Oh restore me to health and make me live! Behold, it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness; but in love you have delivered my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back. (from Hezekiah's prayer in Isaiah 38:16-17)

Showing off

At that time Merodach-baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent envoys with letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that Hezekiah had been sick. And Hezekiah welcomed them, and he showed them all his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his armory, all that was found in his storehouses. There was nothing in his house or in all his realm that Hezekiah did not show them. (2 Kings 20:12-13)

Security for me

Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the Lord: Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the Lord...” Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “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?” (2 Kings 20:16-19)

Heart problem: self centered

Hezekiah prospered in all his works. And so in the matter of the envoys of the princes of Babylon, who had been sent to him to inquire about the sign that had been done in the land, God left him to himself, in order to test him and to know all that was in his heart. (2 Chronicles 32:30-31)

Testing brings heart problems into the open.

- *Illness: self pity, self righteousness*
- *Envoy visit: self promotion, self protection*

Humbled himself

In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death, and he prayed to the Lord, and he answered him and gave him a sign. But Hezekiah did not make return according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was proud. Therefore wrath came upon him and Judah and Jerusalem. But Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the Lord did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah. (2 Chron 32:24-26)

Heroic Hezekiah

Major events in chronological order

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Big bully

In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them. And Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying, "I have done wrong; withdraw from me. Whatever you impose on me I will bear." And the king of Assyria required of Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. (2 Kings 18:13-14)

Superpower Assyria crushed: Sepharvaim, Hamath, Arpad, Hena, Ivvah, Samaria, Damascus, Babylon

More with us than with him

Hezekiah set combat commanders over the people and gathered them together to him in the square at the gate of the city and spoke encouragingly to them, saying, “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him, for there are more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles.” And the people took confidence from the words of Hezekiah king of Judah. (2 Chron 32:6-8)

Persuasive liar

And the Rabshakeh said to them, “Say to Hezekiah, ‘Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: On what do you rest this trust of yours? ...if you say to me, “We trust in the Lord our God,” is it not he whose high places and altars Hezekiah has removed... Moreover, is it without the Lord that I have come up against this place to destroy it? The Lord said to me, Go up against this land, and destroy it.’” (2 Kings 18:19-25)

Intimidation

“Has my master sent me to speak these words to your master and to you, and not to the men sitting on the wall, who are doomed with you to eat their own dung and to drink their own urine?” (18:27)

Can any god stop Assyria?

Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria! Thus says the king: ‘Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you out of my hand. Do not let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord by saying, The Lord will surely deliver us, and this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.’ ... Has any of the gods of the nations ever delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? (18:28-33)

Greater than the Lord of hosts?

Shall the axe boast over him who hews with it, or the saw magnify itself against him who wields it? As if a rod should wield him who lifts it, or as if a staff should lift him who is not wood! Therefore the Lord God of hosts will send wasting sickness among his stout warriors, and under his glory a burning will be kindled, like the burning of fire. (Isaiah 10:15-16)

Nasty letter

“Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you... Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, devoting them to destruction. And shall you be delivered?” (2 Kings 19:9-11)

Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD and spread it before the LORD. (19:14)

The living God

And Hezekiah prayed before the Lord and said: “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. Incline your ear, O Lord, and hear; open your eyes, O Lord, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God. (2 Kings 19:15-16)

That all kingdoms may know

Truly, O Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. Therefore they were destroyed. So now, O Lord our God, save us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O Lord, are God alone.” (2 Kings 19:17-19)

Our shield and defender

Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Your prayer to me about Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard... He shall not come into this city or shoot an arrow there, or come before it with a shield or cast up a siege mound against it... For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David.” (2 Kings 19:20-34)

And that night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. (19:35)

The Destruction of Sennacherib (Alfred, Lord Tennyson)

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold:
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

Like the leaves of the forest when Summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen:
Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and forever grew still!

And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow and the rust on his mail;
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.

And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord.

Death of a tyrant

Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went home and lived at Nineveh. And as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, Adrammelech and Sharezer, his sons, struck him down with the sword and escaped into the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place. (2 Kings 19:26-37)

Ozymandias

Percy Bysshe Shelley

I met a traveler from an antique land,
Who said—Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed;

And on the pedestal these words appear:
“My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:

Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!”
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

Behold, the nations are ... accounted as the dust on the scales... All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness. (Isaiah 40:15-17)

God shall arise, his enemies shall be scattered; and those who hate him shall flee before him! As smoke is driven away, so you shall drive them away; as wax melts before fire, so the wicked shall perish before God! But the righteous shall be glad; they shall exult before God; they shall be jubilant with joy! ... The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands... Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens. Our God is a God who saves. (Psalm 68:1-3, 17-19)

“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him, for there are more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles.” (2 Chronicles 32:6-8)