

Another Goliath

We Three Kings – Part II

II Kings 18-19; II Chronicles 32:1-19

Introduction

One of our church members told me a funny story of two brothers. I could identify with these fellows, having grown up with three brothers. These two boys were always creating mischief and were always in trouble and were nearly driving their poor mother insane. She did not know exactly what to do, until a minister and his family moved in across the street. She thought, “Maybe this is my hope.”

So, the boys mother went over to talk to this pastor. She asked if he would please help in some way if he thought that he could. He thought for a moment, this middle-aged, very dignified pastor, and said, “Well, why don’t you bring your ten year old over to see me? I think what he needs is a lesson in theology.”

So, she sent her ten year old boy over. The pastor sat him down and said, in his clerical voice, “Young man, do you know where God is?”

The boy was a little perplexed and remained quiet. The pastor thought this was not going too well, so he moved a little closer and raised his voice and said, “Son, I asked you a question. Do you know where God is?”

The boy seemed fairly frightened at this question and remained silent. So the pastor moved a little closer and said, “Young man, I asked you a question. WHERE IS GOD?”

That was all the boy could take. He jumped up, ran terrified out of the house, across the street, and up to his bedroom. He saw his little brother and said, “Oh, we’re in trouble! God is missing and they think we had something to do with it!”

I was accused of a lot of things when I was growing up, but never that one!

In our study of the books of Kings and Chronicles, it seems that prophet after prophet after prophet came to the kings of Judah and Israel and asked that same question, “Where is God?”. The only difference is that they meant it.

God was missing from the national and personal life, and every king, it seemed, one after another, would run in rebellion, away from the question, and certainly, away from God. This was the case until a king by the name of Hezekiah that we have began studying, seemed to run to God. In his very first weeks after ascending the throne, this young twenty-five year old king, basically said, “Let’s find God!”

We observed then, a rather surprising revival that occurred in the land. And, as we have studied through the story of Hezekiah and his nation, I have made analogy to our own nation. While Israel is not America, there have been some interesting insights into what makes a nation rise and what makes a nation fall.

Charles Malik, one time Ambassador to the United Nations from Lebanon, wrote,

The good in the United States would never have come into being without the blessing and the power of Jesus Christ. . . . I know how embarrassing this matter is to politicians, bureaucrats, businessmen and cynics; but, whatever these honored men think, the irrefutable truth is that, America, at its best and highest, is Christian.

David made it clear as he wrote in Psalm, chapter 33, verse 12a,

Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord .

..

And also, in Psalm, chapter 144, verse 15b, as he wrote,

. . . how blessed are the people whose God is the Lord!

Solomon also wrote the unilateral principle, in Proverbs, chapter 14, verse 34,

Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.

That truth has been revealed through flesh and blood illustration, as we observed the revival that occurred as Hezekiah led the nation back to the Lord

God. Let us continue our study of this revival in the books of Kings and Chronicles.

The Restoration of Hezekiah's Nation

Look with me at II Kings, chapter 18, verses 5 through 6a,

He trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel; so that after him there was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor among those who were before him. For he clung to the Lord; . . .

The word for “cling” is the same Hebrew root found in Genesis, chapter 2, as God commanded Adam to “cleave or be joined” to his wife. The word has the meaning, “to bond to; to cling, as ivy to a tree”.

Hezekiah clung to the Lord like a strand of ivy to a tree. Look at the outward proof in verse 4.

He removed the high places and broke down the sacred pillars and cut down the Asherah. He also broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the sons of Israel burned incense to it; and it was called Nehushtan.

Stop at this verse long enough to observe the tendency of human nature to want something visible to worship; something tangible. Can you imagine, for seven hundred years the Israelites have been carting around this bronze serpent that was once used as a symbol of healing?! You can read the whole story in Numbers, chapter 21. And now, the text tells us, they were burning incense to it.

One of the first courageous acts of Hezekiah was to destroy a seven hundred year old tradition. Can you imagine? We have trouble in the church changing anything!

I remember learning that unforgettable truth as a college student. I would drive about an hour into the foothills of Tennessee and preach in a small chapel every Wednesday night. The faithful seven or eight adults would arrive and I would preach. Then, on Sunday morning, I would drive there again with a seminarian and his wife. He was serving as an interim chapel pastor and he would preach while I led the music. Attendance would swell to twenty-five or thirty.

The chapel was a small, white clapboard building with gas heaters and hard wooden pews. On the wall behind the pulpit was an old paper banner, yellowed with age, curling up around the edges, and not too artistic to begin with. It spelled out a Bible verse and some simple theme.

After much discussion, the seminarian and I decided to breathe fresh life into that musty chapel by developing a new theme for the year. So, his wife, who was very creative, painted a new banner with a new theme and a new verse.

The next Sunday morning, we arrived early and took down that old paper banner. With great excitement, we began hanging up the new theme banner. About that time, the “pillar” of the church walked in. He doubled as a college professor and mainstay at the chapel. He taught the only adult Sunday school class and had done so for twenty years or more. He stopped dead in his tracks and, looking up at us, bellowed, “What are you doing?”

The pastor and I looked at each other, realizing then that we were doing the wrong thing. He meekly said, “We’re, uh, putting up a new banner.”

He said, “That banner’s been hanging there for nearly ten years.”

I had the urge to say, “And it looks like it.”

Then, that pillar of the church, which we now knew was the reason for its lack of vitality and growth, turned on his heel and stomped out of the building, slamming the front door of the church behind him.

We quietly took the new banner down and put the old one back up, where it is probably hanging to this day.

I learned an unforgettable lesson – fresh ideas can become sacred, worn out methods, and old, sacred methods rarely die.

The principle is this,

One of the foundation stones of Hezekiah's revival was change!

This was upsetting, radical, earthmoving change! And do not think for a moment that he did not create a long list of enemies when he broke that brass serpent into pieces and threw it in the garbage.

The Reversal of Hezekiah's Fortunes

Now, for the next fourteen years, the nation flourished. However, after flourishing for years, the nation experienced a surprising turn of events. Notice verse 13 of II Kings, chapter 18.

Now in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and seized them.

Now, turn to II Chronicles, chapter 32. I want you to notice the almost ironic twist that Ezra points out, as he records the biography of Hezekiah. Look at verse 1.

After these acts of faithfulness Sennacherib, king of Assyria came and invaded Judah and besieged the fortified cities, and thought to break into them for himself.

Did you notice the words,

After these acts of faithfulness, Sennacherib king of Assyria came and invaded Judah . . .

Something seems wrong with that, doesn't it? We would expect to read, "After fourteen years of faithfulness, God guaranteed Hezekiah peace and prosperity," not trouble.

The very name of Assyria struck terror in the hearts of the people. The Assyrians were an especially cruel people who delighted in torturing their victims. Their capital city was Nineveh, which was the reason Jonah was so upset that God would allow them to repent and live.

Had I been in Hezekiah's sandals, my first thoughts would have been, "Thanks a lot, Lord."

He might have thought, "I've restored the temple; I've restored the worship of God; I've destroyed the high places and idol worship. Is this how God rewards me?"

We actually have archeological discoveries of Sennacherib's royal journals during this time. He wrote, "I have hemmed up Hezekiah in Jerusalem like a bird within its cage."

This is another story of David and Goliath. Undefeated Sennacherib of Assyria against little Jerusalem who could not even muster a thousand men to ride chariots into battle.

One of the hardest lessons for every believer to learn is that salvation did not end the fight, it began the fight. Salvation did not ease trouble, it created new trouble. It did not automatically erase your worries, it gave you a thousand new things to worry

about. It did not eternally repel demonic attack, it invited attack. It invited attack so much so, that Paul wrote, in Ephesians, chapter 6, verse 11,

Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

One of the key battlegrounds happens to be in the mind, where we doubt and distrust our Lord. That is what happened to faithful Hezekiah. Go back to II Kings, chapter 18, and look at verse 14a.

Then 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." . . .

That was a mistake, by the way. Hezekiah, according to verse 7, had stopped tribute payments, or bribe money. Now, however, he weakens with fear and uncertainty. Notice what happens, according to verse 14b.

. . . So the king of Assyria required of Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold.

That is eleven tons of silver and one ton of gold. Continue to look at the results in verses 15 and 16.

Hezekiah gave him all the silver which was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasuries of the king's house. At that time Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord, and from the doorposts which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria.

Sennacherib's own journals, that have been preserved in the British Museum, record that Hezekiah also gave to him, "woven cloth, scarlet, precious stones of large size, couches of ivory, movable thrones of ivory, and skins of buffaloes."

"Goliath" had intimidated Israel into paralyzing fear.

Did this buy off Sennacherib? Oh no! Instead, he sends three men to Hezekiah to force complete surrender and occupation of Jerusalem by the Assyrian empire. Notice verse 17.

Then the king of Assyria sent Tartan and Rab-saris and Rabshakeh from Lachish to King Hezekiah with a large army to Jerusalem. So they went up and came to Jerusalem. And when they went up, they

came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which is on the highway of the fuller's field.

These three Assyrian names are not actually proper names, but titles. The meanings are:

- Tartan – “Commander in Chief”;
- Rab-saris – “Chief Officer”;
- Rabshakeh – “Chief of Staff”.

This was the “top brass” from the Assyrian empire and its incredible army. Standing there on that highway, they looked as polished and impressive and intimidating as the Philistine warrior with his gleaming armor, his spear, and his shield bearer. Israel looked as foolish and unimpressive as a young boy with a sling-shot. This is no contest!!

Most of chapter 18 is the speech delivered by the Chief of Staff to the emissaries of Hezekiah. Let us read a little of it, beginning with verse 28 through verse 35.

Then Rabshakeh stood and cried with a loud voice in Judean, saying, “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 from my hand;

nor let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord, saying, ‘The Lord will surely deliver us, and this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.’”

Do not listen to Hezekiah, for thus says the king of Assyria, ‘Make your peace with me and come out to me, and eat each of his vine and each of his fig tree and drink each of the waters of his own cistern,

until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and honey, that you may live and not die.’ But do not listen to Hezekiah, when he misleads you, saying, ‘The Lord will deliver us.’

Has any one of the gods of the nations delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria?

Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim,

Hena and Ivvah? Have they delivered Samaria from my hand?

Who among all the gods of the lands have delivered their land from my hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem from my hand?”

Continue to verses 36 through 37 for the reaction of the Israelite people.

But the people were silent and answered him not a word, for the king's commandment was, “Do not answer him.”

Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn and told him the words of Rabshakeh.

Chapter 19, verse 1, gives us Hezekiah's reaction.

And when King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth and entered the house of the Lord.

Wow! David wrote in Psalm, chapter 46, verse 1,
God is . . . a very present help in trouble.

The word translated “trouble” is from the Hebrew verb meaning, “to be restricted, to tie up, to be narrow, cramped”. In contemporary terminology we would say, “We're in a jam; we're between a rock and a hard place; we're in a tight squeeze.”

The enemy puts on more and more pressure, while at the same time, whispering in your ear, “Your God cannot deliver you; He cannot be trusted.”

If we learn anything from Hezekiah's story, we can learn this principle,

Trusting in God is not a one time event.

You do not say, “Trust in God? Yea, I've already done that. Let's see, May of 1987 is when I did that!”

Trusting in God is not one event, it is a series of events. Each challenge requires a fresh application of trust.

The Response of Hezekiah's God

For Hezekiah, things were going from bad to worse. Rabshakeh returns with a second, even more frightening, intimidating message from Sennacherib. Look at verses 10 through 13 of chapter 19.

Thus you shall say to Hezekiah king of Judah, “Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you saying, ‘Jerusalem will not

be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.'

Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the lands, destroying them completely. So will you be spared?

Did the gods of those nations which my fathers destroyed deliver them, even Gozan and Haran and Rezeph and the sons of Eden who were in Telassar?

Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, and of Hena and Ivvah?"

Notice Hezekiah's response in verse 14.

Then Hezekiah took the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it, and he went up to the house of the Lord and spread it out before the Lord.

I love this! There is nothing Hezekiah can do. He takes the letter (that word in this verse is plural in the Hebrew, indicating it was several pieces of either papyrus or leather), and he spreads them out. He is alone in the temple of God and is dressed in clothing of mourning. I think of Abraham Lincoln who said, "I have often been driven to my knees, convinced that there was nowhere else to go."

He has tried to bring change; he has tried to follow God; he has tried to lead the people back to God. Now, however, he is beaten and discouraged. But wait, there is one glimmer of hope! The fact that he is laying this letter out on the floor implies that he still believes that God can see. Yes, Hezekiah believed God was alive, unlike the idols of Sennacherib and Samaria that had neither hands nor feet, nor eyes to see or ears to hear. Even though it seemed that during these days, God was not looking, or caring, Hezekiah was, with perhaps his last ounce of trust, saying, "Lord I know You can see. I believe You care."

The prayer of Hezekiah

Let us look at Hezekiah's prayer. There are a couple things to notice about this prayer.

There is a statement of faith

1. First, there is a statement of faith.

Look at verse 15.

Hezekiah prayed before the Lord and said, "O Lord, the God of Israel, who art enthroned above the cherubim, You are the God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth."

Can you hear this? In his darkest hour, a man who knew less than ten percent of what we know about God today; a man who understood less about God's providence than we do today; a man who had a scrap of scripture compared to our completed scripture today, declared, "I know You are the God who created all there is."

There is a simple request

2. Then, there is a simple request.

Look at verses 16 through 19.

"Incline Your ear, O Lord, and hear; open Your eyes, O Lord, and see; and listen to the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God. Truly, O Lord, the kings of Assyria have devastated 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. So they have destroyed them. Now, O Lord our God, I pray, deliver us from his hand that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone, O Lord, are God."

Did you notice the motive of his prayer? Did he pray, "Lord, deliver us so that we'll have our peace and prosperity back," or "Lord, deliver us so that all our enemies will never bother us again"? No!

Someone in our congregation told me a funny story of a woman in the church who had a parrot. The trouble was, this parrot was an embarrassment to her. Every time someone came to visit her, the parrot would say, "Let's kiss. Let's kiss. Let's kiss."

She did not know what to do. Finally, a new pastor arrived to lead their church and he, believe it or not, owned a parrot. His parrot said two words that you would only expect a clergyman's parrot to say. His parrot said, "Let's pray. Let's pray."

This woman thought, "That's my solution! I'll bring my parrot over to his parrot and the good influence will rub off on my parrot. My parrot will learn to say, 'Let's pray,' instead of 'Let's kiss'."

So, she brought her parrot to the pastor's home. They put her parrot into the cage with his parrot and

sure enough, her parrot immediately cooed, “Let’s kiss. Let’s kiss.”

The pastor’s parrot then said, “My prayers have finally been answered.”

What you are saying in your prayers might sound good, but why are you praying them? James, in chapter 4, verse 3, leveled the charge at the Jewish believers that,

You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

Hezekiah prayed, “Lord, deliver us from his hand so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone are God!”

Continue to verse 20 of chapter 19.

Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah saying, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Because you have prayed to Me about Sennacherib king of Assyria, I have heard you.’”

Wouldn’t it be wonderful to have a prophet of God come to your door and ring the doorbell? And then, when you answer it, to have that long robed prophet with a beard say to you, “Hello! My name is Isaiah. I’ve come to tell you that God has heard your prayer.”?

Wouldn’t that be wonderful? Would it make a difference to you?

Listen to John, the apostle, as he says, in I John, chapter 5, verse 14,

This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

Listen to Jeremiah as he tells you, in chapter 33, verse 3, on behalf of God,

Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.

Listen to David as he says, in Psalm, chapter 94, verse 9,

***He who planted the ear, does He not hear?
He who formed the eye, does He not see?***

And, in Psalm, chapter 4, verse 3b, he tells us,

. . . The Lord hears when I call to Him.

Listen to Peter say, in I Peter, chapter 5, verse 7,

Casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

Ladies and gentlemen, we do not need prophets coming to our front porches. We have God’s promises in writing, which Hezekiah did not.

Now notice verses 35 through 37 of chapter 19.

Then it happened that night that the angel of the Lord went out and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men rose early in the morning, behold, all of them were dead. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and returned home, and lived at Nineveh. It came about as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son became king in his place.

Do not miss the irony of Ezra’s message in these verses. Did you notice that Sennacherib was praying to his god in his temple? His god could not deliver him, even as he prayed to him in the temple. However, Hezekiah prayed to God in His temple, and Hezekiah’s God delivered him.

Goliath fell and David won again; that is, Sennacherib died and Hezekiah grew in his faith. And, God received all the glory.

What was the turning point? It was when Hezekiah went before God while everything was dark and frightening, and opened his heart to Him and trusted Him to deliver him from his position between that rock and a hard place. The turning point was when he at that moment, with fresh application which challenges us to this day, decided to cling to his God, like ivy to a tree.