

Lessons from Old Testament Kings - Hezekiah

Reading: Romans 15:4 “... *whatever things were written before were written for our learning*”

Introduction:

This lesson is the last in the current series where we are looking at some of the Old Testament Kings, both good and bad, and drawing some practical lessons from both their lives and events that occurred during their reigns, in order to help us in our walk with God (**Ephesians 5:8**).

In this lesson, we will be looking at King Hezekiah. He was the thirteenth king of Judah after the nation had split during the reign of Rehoboam – refer to Annex A of this lesson. The scriptures summarise his life by saying; “*And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father David had done*”¹ (**2 Kings 18:3**). In other words, he had a heart that wanted to serve the Lord, just like David, and that heart led him to do what was right (**2 Kings 18:5-7a**).

LESSON

1) The background leading up to the reign of Hezekiah

a) The political situation in Judah

During the reign of Amaziah, the nation of Judah conquered some parts of Edom – the nation that lies to the south of the Dead Sea, towards the Gulf of Aqaba (**2 Chronicles 25:11-12**). His successor, Uzziah², had even greater military victories. He (re)built the city of Elath³ in Edom and restored it to Judah’s control (**2 Chronicles 26:2**). He also captured and dismantled Philistine fortresses near the Mediterranean coast, then built his own cities in the area (**2 Chronicles 26:6**). The Ammonites⁴ were forced to pay tribute to him (**2 Chronicles 26:8**). He built towers in Jerusalem and in the desert, and built up a strong, well equipped army (**2 Chronicles 26:9-15**). The following king, Jotham, continued the military expansion by building towers and fortresses in the forests. He also fought and defeated the Ammonites (**2 Chronicles 27:4-5**).

However, during the reign of Ahaz, Judah’s military strength suffered badly because of his unfaithfulness (**2 Chronicles 28:19**). Rezin, the king of Syria, captured Elath and drove Judah out, allowing the Edomites to return and control the city (**2 Kings 16:6**). Syria, Israel and Edom attacked Judah at various times, and cities in the south-west of Judah were lost back to the Philistines (**2 Chronicles 28:5-18**). Ahaz sought help from the Assyrians, who were quickly becoming the dominant power in the region. He sent treasures from the house of the Lord as a present to the king of Assyria. But the Assyrians provided no help, other than to attack and defeat Damascus in Syria (**2 Kings 16:9; 2 Chronicles 28:16, 20-21**).

So the military gains that were achieved under Uzziah were now lost, and Assyria was extending its control over the surrounding area.

¹ Biblical quotes are from the New King James Version (NKJV) Bible.

² Uzziah is also known as Azariah, e.g. **2 Kings 14:21**.

³ Elath sits at the northern end of the Gulf of Aqaba. It was probably taken from Judah’s control during the revolt of Edom in the days of Joram /Jehoram (**2 Kings 8:21-22**).

⁴ The land of Ammon lies to the east of the northern part of the Dead Sea.

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b) The religious situation in Judah

Idolatry had returned in Judah during the latter part of King Joash's reign (see previous lesson), and subsequent kings did little (or nothing) to return the nation to worshipping the Lord Jehovah in accordance with the Law of Moses. The high places still remained throughout the land (**2 Kings 14:1-4; 15:1-4; 15:32-35; 16:1-4**). When Joash's successor, Amaziah, attacked the nation of Edom, he had brought their gods back to Jerusalem to worship (**2 Chronicles 25:14**).

But King Ahaz, Hezekiah's father (**2 Kings 18:1**), was even worse. Firstly, he had seen an altar in Damascus when he went to visit the king of Assyria. He liked the altar so much that he ordered Urijah the priest to build a replica and set it up in the Temple grounds in Jerusalem. This new altar was then used for sacrifices instead of using the bronze altar built by Solomon⁵ (**2 Kings 16:10-16**). Secondly, he made images for the Baals (**2 Chronicles 28:2**). Thirdly, he offered sacrifices and "... *burned incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree*" (**2 Chronicles 28:4**). Fourthly, he burned his own children as sacrifices (**2 Chronicles 28:3**), and finally, he shut up the doors to the Temple (**2 Chronicles 28:24-25**).

2) The reign of Hezekiah

a) Hezekiah restores the Temple and worship of the Lord

When it came to matters of religion, Hezekiah chose not to follow the same path as did his father and predecessors. He chose to do "... *what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father⁶ David had done. He removed the high places and broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden image (of Asherah, a Canaanite goddess), and broke in pieces the bronze serpent⁷ that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan*" (**2 Kings 18:3-4**).

In the first year of his reign, he reopened the doors⁸ of the Temple and told the Levites to sanctify themselves, remove all the rubbish from the Temple, and to stand before the Lord (**2 Chronicles 29:4-11**). This they did. The rubbish was removed, they sanctified themselves, and restored all the articles associated with the Temple (**2 Chronicles 29:12-19**).

Once all this was done, Hezekiah gathered all rulers of the city and they went to the house of the Lord. Sacrifices were offered on the altar by the sons of Aaron as a sin offering to make atonement for all Israel (**2 Chronicles 29:20-24**). Those who were assembled bowed and worshipped the Lord. This was followed by other sacrifices and "thank offerings". And so "... *the service of the house of the Lord was set in order*" amid great rejoicing (**2 Chronicles 29:25-36**).

Next, Hezekiah proclaimed that all the people throughout the land, from Beersheba in the south to Dan in the north, should come and observe the

⁵ The bronze altar was part of the Temple items built by Solomon (**2 Chronicles 4:1**) and used for sacrifices (**1 Kings 9:25**).

⁶ The term "father" in this context means ancestral father, not immediate father.

⁷ Refer to **Numbers 21:4-9** for the background to the bronze serpent.

⁸ They had been closed up by his father, Ahaz – **2 Chronicles 28:24**.

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Passover in Jerusalem. Many came, including some from the northern kingdom of Israel, for they had not held the Passover in the prescribed manner for quite a long time. The Passover was then followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread, as per the Law of Moses⁹ (**2 Chronicles 30:1-22**).

After these things, all those who took part in the Passover and the Feast went out and destroyed all the sacred pillars, images and altars that had been set up for idol worship in the lands of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim and Manasseh (**2 Chronicles 31:1**). A real change had taken place in the land.

Hezekiah also set in order the provision for the priests and Levites. *“Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah, and he did what was good and right and true before the Lord his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, in the law and in the commandment, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart. So he prospered.”* (**2 Chronicles 31:2-21**).

b) Hezekiah and Jerusalem under siege from Assyria

As mentioned previously in this lesson, Assyria was the rising, dominant power in the region. In the fourteenth year of Hezekiah’s reign, Sennacherib (king of Assyria) came, attacked and captured the fortified cities of Judah (**2 Kings 18:13**). He then attacked the city of Lachish, located mid-way between Jerusalem and Gaza. Hezekiah could see that Jerusalem was also in line to be threatened, and so he strengthened Jerusalem’s defences (**2 Chronicles 32:2-5**). But at the same time, he took silver and gold from the Temple and sent it to Sennacherib in the hope that the Assyrians would go away (**2 Kings 18:14-16**).

But the Assyrians didn’t go away. In fact, Sennacherib sent his chief political and military leaders to Jerusalem. They stood outside the wall and made boasts to the people inside the city. They told them not to trust in any help from Egypt, nor to put any trust in God. Their boasts included, *“The gods of the other nations had not been able to withstand the power of the Assyrians, so why do you expect the Lord God to save you?”*. They also tried to entice the people to give themselves up by offering them horses and a promise of a new land rich in agriculture (**2 Kings 18:17-35**).

Upon hearing this news, Hezekiah *“... tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord.”* (**2 Kings 19:1**). He also made enquiries to Isaiah, the prophet, who told him not to be afraid, for the Lord was aware of what was happening, and that Sennacherib would fall by the sword in his own land (**2 Kings 19:2-7**).

The Assyrian leaders left Jerusalem and went back to their king, who was now attacking Libnah, a few kilometres north of Lachish. So Sennacherib sent messengers back to Jerusalem with a message containing the same boasts as before, *i.e.* that the Lord God would not be able to save them (**2 Kings 19:8-13**). Once he had read the message, Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord to pray to God about the situation (**2 Kings 19:14-19**).

The Lord heard Hezekiah’s prayer, and sent him word via Isaiah. God said that it was He (God) who had allowed Assyria to have its previous victories (**2 Kings 19:25-26**). But He had also heard their boasts and their raging

⁹ For example, **Exodus 13:3-10** and **Deuteronomy 16:1-8**.

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against Him. Therefore, He would send the Assyrians back to their homeland by the same way in which they came (**2 Kings 19:27-28**). The Lord assured Hezekiah that the Assyrians would not come into the city, not even shoot an arrow at it, for the Lord would defend Jerusalem for David's sake (**2 Kings 19:32-34**).

On a certain night, the angel of the Lord went out and killed 185,000 in the Assyrian camp. Defeated, Sennacherib returned to his home in Nineveh, where sometime later, he was struck down and killed by his own sons (**2 Kings 19:35-37**).

3) Lessons for us

I want to draw the following three lessons from the life and times of Hezekiah;

- a) Be faithful to God, from the heart, regardless of what others do or have done.

Hezekiah's predecessors had allowed idolatry to continue. His own father, Ahaz, was heavily involved in it, including offering human sacrifice. But Hezekiah wasn't the type of person who simply did what everybody else was doing. He chose to follow the Lord and do what was right, instead of simply doing what others did. He followed the Lord with all his heart and did things in accordance with God's Word (**2 Chronicles 31:21**).

We live in a world full of unbelievers. The pressure from the world, plus the desires from our own mortal bodies to do as the world does can be enormous. The world is tangible; it is "in your face"; and it is constant. To follow the Lord means going against many of our natural desires (**Ephesians 2:3**) and the influence of the world. That is why it can be hard sometimes.

Each one of us has to make our own decision as to whether we follow Christ, or not – the choice is ours (**Joshua 24:15; Acts 2:40**). When we stand before God in judgement (**2 Corinthians 5:10**), we cannot justify our own sins by pointing out the sins of others. Whatever sins other people have committed, they will have to answer to God for themselves. The way that other people live their lives is not the standard for Judgement¹⁰ – God's Word is (**John 12:48**).

Therefore, each of us need to choose to obey the Lord and follow His Word with all our heart, just like Hezekiah.

- b) In times of trouble, seek help from the Lord

When the Assyrians had threatened the city of Jerusalem, it spelt potential doom and defeat for its inhabitants. Up to this point, no other nation which had been attacked by the Assyrians had been able to withstand them (**2 Chronicles 32:13-15**). When he was given the intimidating message from Sennacherib, Hezekiah took the matter to the Lord – he laid out the message before the Lord and prayed to Him for help (**2 Kings 19:14-19**).

During our lives, we will face various problems and challenges. The Lord knows this, He faced them Himself (**Hebrews 4:15**). But although He is no

¹⁰ We should not measure our faithfulness by comparing it to the faithfulness of others – see **2 Corinthians 10:12**. We should always be "measuring" ourselves against Jesus and His Word.

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longer here, He has not left us alone. We are blessed with the avenue of prayer. In **Philippians 4:6** we read;

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;”

When you have a problem, take it to the Lord. Don't be afraid to spell it all out to Him (even though He already knows what you are going to say – **Psalms 139:4**), open your heart to Him and lay on Him all your cares. If you are obedient to Him and approach Him with a humble heart, then He will hear you (**Luke 18:10-14; 1 John 3:22**).

c) Our God is an all-powerful God – He can do more than we can imagine.

When the inhabitants of Jerusalem heard the boasts and threats from the Assyrians, they probably wondered how on earth they could be saved – how could they stand up against this huge army from Assyria. But the Lord heard Hezekiah's prayer, because Hezekiah was faithful to the Lord (**2 Chronicles 29:2**), and because of Sennacherib's boasting against the Lord (**2 Kings 19:20, 28**). And so the Lord struck down 185,000 of the Assyrians (**2 Kings 19:35**), saving the city.

We sometimes stumble because we try to do things simply by our own strength and abilities - we think that if we can't come up with an answer to a problem, then God won't be able to, either.

But nothing is impossible for God. He created everything, and He upholds all things by the word of His power (**Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:3**). He is not constrained by the laws of nature, nor by the will of any man who tries to oppose Him. There are many examples in the scriptures that demonstrate His power¹¹.

We cannot hope to understand or figure out how powerful He is, or how He does things, because we are only human and He is God. But He is our God, and He can do "... *exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think ...*" (**Ephesians 3:20**). Never underestimate what God can do.

¹¹ For example, **Joshua 10:12-13; 2 Kings 6:24 – 7:16; 2 Kings 20:1-11 and Acts 12:5-10**.

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Annex A - Kings of Judah and Israel

| Combined nation | Year BC (approx.) | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| Saul | 1050 | |
| David | | |
| Solomon | | |
| Judah | Kingdom splits | Israel |
| Rehoboam | 930 | Jeroboam |
| Abijam | | Nadab |
| Asa | | Baasha, Elah, Zimri |
| | | Omri |
| Jehoshaphat | | Ahab, Ahaziah |
| Jehoram | | Jehoram |
| Ahaziah | 840 | Jehu |
| Athaliah | | |
| Joash (Jehoash) | | Jehoahaz |
| Amaziah | | Jehoash |
| Uzziah (Azariah) | | Jeroboam (ii) |
| | | Zechariah, Shallum, |
| Jotham | 740 | Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah |
| Ahaz | | Hoshea |
| Hezekiah* | | Fall of Israel - 722 |
| Manasseh | | |
| Amon | | |
| Josiah | 640 | |
| Jehoahaz | | |
| Jehoiakim | | |
| Jehoiachin | | |
| Zedekiah | 586 | |
| Fall of Jerusalem - 586 | | |

*the subject of this lesson