

Hezekiah's Last Words

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[0 : 00] Our talk is entitled Hezekiah's Last Words. There they are. And of course they're not actually Hezekiah's last words in the sense that they're the words he spoke on his deathbed and they're the last words he ever spoke.

But they are the last words of Hezekiah that we have recorded in Scripture. And in the way the story is recorded, these are the last words that he says.

And I put them up here because at the very end of the talk, we're going to discuss how we feel about Hezekiah's last words.

And I have to admit that when I gave Alexandra this topic, I thought there would be a lot more time to spend on Hezekiah's last words. And I just give this little sort of historical introduction.

But when I actually looked at it, the historical context is really, really complex. And we're going to end up probably spending more time on it than I had initially thought. So before we get started, let's bow for a word of prayer.

[1 : 03] Our Father, we thank you for who you are. And we thank you that throughout history, you have related to your people in a way that draws them to yourself.

And we pray that as we look at your relationship to Hezekiah and to the people who lived in his day, that we might gain a fuller understanding of who you are and how we should respond to you.

In the name of Jesus, amen. So the period that we are looking at is the period of the divided kingdom of Israel and Judah.

And you probably remember that that happened pretty well right after the death of Solomon. Ten tribes were the nation of Israel.

Two tribes, Judah and Simeon, and maybe a little bit of Benjamin, were basically the nation of Judah. Throughout the history, there's really very little the Bible has to say that is good about the nation of Israel.

[2 : 07] Not one king gets called a good king. There was spiritual apostasy, political anarchy, social dysfunction.

The religion became very syncretistic. A lot of foreign gods, or at least gods that should have been foreign to Israel, were incorporated.

There was worship on all the high hills of Judah. And you might remember that right at the very beginning, the first king, Jeroboam, said, there's no way I want these people going down to Jerusalem to worship.

If we're going to be a separate nation, we need to have our own places of worship. And he built those two golden bowls, which he put in Bethel and in Dan. And those were the high places where Israel worshipped.

The monarchy was not part of the Davidic line. The kings, there were coups, assassinations, just all kinds of intrigue going on.

[3 : 09] And by the time the nation ended, there was a period of, I think, five years where they had four different kings. Just total anarchy a lot of the time. Not always, but a lot of it. And socially, there was just a really huge gap between the rich, the leaders, and the poor.

And a lot of the prophets spent a lot of their time criticizing this. Judah is not quite in the same direction.

And Hezekiah, of course, is king of Judah. They're not as far down the road as Israel. In Judah, the Davidic line is still unbroken.

So father to son, basically. And there were some good kings. Not as many as we'd like to see, but there were some. Kings that are commended, basically, in the Bible.

And the worship was still in the temple. But there was also worship on the hill shrines around the country. Because the temple was a ways away from, even in Judah, it was a long walk to get to the temple.

[4 : 22] People didn't do it often. And on the hill shrines, there were even altars to Yahweh on the hill shrines. So it wasn't only foreign gods, but even Yahweh was worshipped on hill shrines.

There was some social dysfunction, but the gap between the rich and the poor probably wasn't as great in Judah as it was in Israel. At the period we're looking at, which is sort of the middle to early 8th century BC, there weren't really any large empires in the Middle East before this time, at least during the history of Israel.

But around 745 BC, Tiglath-Pileser became emperor of Assyria. And he was a very strong, very powerful, very ruthless king.

And the first thing he did when he became ruler of Assyria was to assert his power against Babylon in the south, against the kingdom called Urartu in the north.

And then he looked to the west where there were all these little kingdoms, Ammon, Moab, Israel, Judah, small stuff. But they were in an important location because they were on the trade route between Egypt and the rest of the Middle East.

[5 : 48] They were on the Mediterranean, where we know from our social studies, grade 7 or whatever, that Phoenicia had a big trading tire in Sidon, where centers of trade and commerce on the Mediterranean.

And so by the time he had been ruler for maybe seven or eight years, he was exacting tribute from all those little kingdoms, including northern Palestine and the nation of Israel.

And then a few years later, some of these little city-states, I mean, nobody likes to pay tribute, right?

And some of these little city-states and small countries in the west of the empire got together and said, let's see if we can get rid of the king of Assyria.

And the king of Syria and the king of Israel were leading this coalition. And they asked Judah, do you want to come in with us? The king of Judah at that time was Ahaz, who was Hezekiah's father. And he found himself in a difficult position. He had just become king. He didn't want to go in with Israel and Syria.

[7 : 13] But because he was not going to be part of them, they were operating on the premise that, you know, the enemy or the friend of my enemy is my enemy.

So if he wasn't going to join their coalition, they were threatening to attack him. And what Ahaz did was, and this was probably one of the biggest mistakes any king ever made, he went to Assyria and said, can you protect me from these people who are about to attack me?

And he sent them a huge, huge gift. And of course Assyria said, I'd be delighted to because of this. Because this was what they were going to do anyway.

And they were actually getting paid to do what they wanted to do in the first place. So they went in and they attacked Israel and Syria. They deported a lot of the leaders. They murdered the king of Israel and put a puppet in place who immediately surrendered.

And Samaria took a long time to fall. They were besieged for three years. But by the time three years were over, Samaria had fallen and Israel basically was no more.

[8 : 29] Judah at this time, Samaria actually fell in 721. So this all takes place over quite a few years. Judah was not invaded at this time, but they did have to pay tribute to Assyria.

And this was something that Ahaz basically asked for. I mean, he thought that Assyria would somehow offer them protection. And one of the things that the Bible does say is that in his negotiations with the king of Assyria, he went to Damascus.

And while he was there, he saw an Assyrian altar. And he came back home. And we're not clear about the, why he did this, whether it was his own decision or whether somebody pressured him. But he came back home and said, I saw this Assyrian altar there in Damascus. I want one like that in the temple. And he got someone to actually build an altar for his own use in the temple.

So this is the situation that Hezekiah is inheriting when he becomes king. And this is kind of the setting for the story. So what we're going to do now is we have several readers and we're going to read the three chapters of 2 Kings, which actually tell us the story of Hezekiah.

[9 : 54] So I'd ask, I'm going to move these things out of the way and I'm going to ask our readers to come forward and hear what the Bible has to say about Hezekiah. In the third year of Hosea, son of Eli, king of Israel, Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign.

He was 25 years old and when he began his reign and he reigned for 29 years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abbe, 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. He removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah. 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. [10:58] For he held fast to the Lord. He did not depart from following him, but kept the commandments that the Lord commanded Moses. And the Lord was with him.

Wherever he went out, he prospered. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and would not serve him. He struck down the Philistines as far as Gaza and its territory from watchtower to fortified city. In the fourth year of King Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of Hosea, son of Elah, king of Israel, Shalmanasser, king of Assyria, came up against Samaria and besieged it. And at the end of three years, he took it. In the sixth year of Hezekiah, which was the ninth year of Hosea, king of Israel, Samaria was taken. The king of Assyria carried away the Israelites to Assyria and put them in Hala and on the Haber, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes, because they did not obey the voice of the Lord their God, but transgressed his covenant, even all that Moses, the servant of the Lord, commanded. [12:09] They neither listened nor obeyed. 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, 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. And Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord and in the treasuries of the king's house. At that time, Hezekiah stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord and from the doorposts that Hezekiah, king of Judah, had overlaid and gave it to the king of Assyria. And the king of Assyria sent the Tartan, the Rapsaris, and the Rapshaka. It was a great army from Lachish to king Hezekiah at Jerusalem.

[13:13] And they went up and came to Jerusalem. And when they arrived, they came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which is on the highway to the water's field. And when they called for the king, there came out to them Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, and Shebna, the secretary, and Joah, the son of Asaph, the recorder.

And the Rapshaka said to them, Say to Hezekiah, thus says the great king, the king of Assyria, on what do you rest this trust of yours?

Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war? In whom do you now trust that you have rebelled against me? Behold, you are trusting now in Egypt, that broken reed of a staff, which will pierce the hand of any man who leans on it.

Such is Pharaoh the king of Egypt to all who trust in him. But if you say to me, We trust in the Lord our God, is it not he whose high places and altars Hezekiah has removed, saying to Judah and to Jerusalem, you shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem?

Come now, make a wager with my master, the king of Assyria. I will give you 2,000 horses, if you are able on your part to set riders on them.

[14:43] How then can you repulse a single captain among the least of my master's servants when you trust in Egypt for chariots and for horsemen? Moreover, it is 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. Then Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, Sanchevna and Joah, said to the rabshaki, Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand it.

Do not speak to us in the language of Judah within the hearing of the people who are on the wall. 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?

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.

[16:02] Do not listen to Hezekiah, for thus says the king of Assyria, Make your peace with me and come out to me. Then each one of you will eat of his own vine and each of his own fig trees and each one of you will drink the water of his own cistern until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and honey, that you may live and not die.

And do not listen to Hezekiah when he misleads you by saying, The Lord will deliver us. Has any of the gods of the nations ever delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria?

Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharthim, Hina and Eva?

Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? Who among all the gods of the lands have delivered their lands out of my hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?

But the people were silent and answered him not a word, for the king's command was, Do not answer him. Then Eliakim, son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, and Shebna, the secretary, and Joah, the son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn and told him the words of Barabshake.

As soon as king Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth and went into the house of the Lord. And he sent Eliakim, who was over the household, and Shebna, the secretary, and the senior priests, covered with sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah, son of Amos.

[17:55] They said to him, Thus says Hezekiah, This is a day of distress, of rebuke, and of disgrace. Children have come to the point of birth, and there is no strength to bring them forth.

It may be that the Lord, your God, heard all the words of the Rab Shekha, whom his master, the king of Assyria, has sent to mock the living God, and will rebuke the words that the Lord, your God, has heard.

Therefore, lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left. Say to your master, Thus says the Lord, Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard, with which your servants of the king of Assyria have reviled me.

Behold, I will put a spirit in him so that he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land, and I will make him fall by the sword of his own hand.

The Rab Shekha returned and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libna, for he heard that the king had left Lachish. Now the king heard concerning Terhaka, king of Cush.

[19:06] Behold, he has set out to fight against you. So he sent messengers again to Hezekiah. Do not let your God, in whom you trust, deceive you by promising that 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 lands, devoting them to destruction. And shall you be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them, the nations that my fathers destroyed, Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the people of Eden who were in Telassar? Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Savarvim, the king of Hina, or the king of Eva? Hezekiah received a 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. 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 Sena-Karib, which he has sent to mock the living God.

[20:27] 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.

Then Isaiah, the son of Amos, sent to Hezekiah. Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, your prayer to me about Shenzah, the king of Assyria, I have heard.

Therefore, thus says the Lord, concerning the king of Assyria, 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.

By the way he has come, by the same way he shall return. And he shall not come into the city, declares the Lord, for I will defend the city to save it for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David.

[21 : 40] And that night, the angel of the Lord went out and struck down a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies.

Then Sennacherib, king of Assyria, departed and went home and lived at Nineveh. And as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch, his God, Adrammelech and Shirazer, his sons, struck him down with the sword and escaped into the land of Ararat.

And Ezra Haddon, his son, reigned in his place. In those days, Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amos, came 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, 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. And before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the Lord came to him, Turn back and say to Hezekiah as a 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.

[23 : 16] 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 the city out of the hand of the king of Assyria and I will defend the city for my own sake and for my servant David's sake.

Oh, bring a cake of figs and let them take and lay on the boil that may recover. What shall be the sign that the Lord will heal me and that I shall go up to the house of the Lord on the third day? This shall be the sign from the Lord that the Lord will do the thing that he has promised. Shall the shadow go forward ten steps or go back ten steps? It is an easy thing for the shadow to lengthen ten steps.

Rather, let the shadow go back ten steps. Isaiah the prophet called to the Lord and brought the shadow back ten steps by which it had gone down on the steps of Ahaz.

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.

[24 : 42] 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. Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah. What did these men say and from where did they come to you?

They have come from a far country, from Babylon. What have they seen in your house? They have seen all that is in my house. There is nothing in my storehouses that I did not show them.

Hear the word of the Lord. Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house and that which of your fathers have stored up until this day shall be carried to Babylon.

Nothing shall be left, says the Lord. And some of your own sons who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.

[25 : 55] The word of the Lord that you have spoken is good. Why not, if there be peace and security in my deeds? The rest of the deeds of Hezekiah and all his might and how he made the pool and the conduit and brought water into the city, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?

and Hezekiah slept with his fathers and Manasseh, his son, reigned in his place. Thank you to our readers.

And there's a few things I'd like to say about this story. First of all, it is a story that is found in two places in the Bible.

And it's a long story. In the section that we read, which is from 2 Kings, it's three chapters, four chapters, which is about as long a space as any king gets in the book of Kings.

But the story is basically also repeated almost word for word at the end of the first part of Isaiah, which is chapters 36 to 39.

[27 : 20] So this is an important story. And I think the writers wanted us to pay attention to it.

Now Hezekiah, if you remember how this passage started off, was described as a good king. He's one of, with Josiah, basically, he is one of the two best kings that the kingdom of Judah ever had.

He's compared to David. And the writer says there was no king like him either before or after.

Now, lest we take this too literally, he says exactly the same thing about Josiah later. Josiah was basically Hezekiah's great-grandson. But both of these kings carried out really, really extensive

reforms, particularly in the temple.

Because by that time, the temple, as we have seen, it had an altar, an Assyrian altar in it. It wasn't really functioning as God intended it to. It was physically, well, Ahaz, Hezekiah's son, had stripped a lot of the bronze from the temple in order to send that tribute to the king of Assyria.

[28 : 43] And Hezekiah actually restored some of that, cleaned up the temple, got rid of the altars on all the hills of Judah, and he and Josiah were actually the only kings of whom that is said.

Even the other good kings were not able to get rid of those, probably didn't even try to get rid of those local altars. But after Hezekiah has been king for a very short time, probably within the first couple of years of his reign, there was an attempt of some of the nations around to rebel against Assyria.

He wasn't part of that. But by about 704, the current ruler of Assyria, whose name was Sargon, died. And of course, every time a ruler of an empire dies, there's a lot of rebellion, power struggles basically going on.

And they thought this would be a good attempt to throw off the yoke of Assyria. Not only Judah thought this, but a lot of the nations who were under Assyria's rule.

Babylon revolted, and there was a coalition in the west, Tyre, some of the Philistine cities, possibly Moab and Ammon. Egypt was getting strong again.

[30 : 09] They had had a period of weakness, but they were getting strong again and promised to help. And Hezekiah was actually a leader in this revolt. So when we read about Shalmaneser coming and besieging Jerusalem, coming and destroying most of the country of Judah, he's there because Hezekiah and some of his rulers, some of his colleagues, I guess you could call them his allies in other nations, are getting together to revolt against the king of Assyria.

And of course, Judah is a very small place. It doesn't have a big army. It doesn't have any horses or chariots. And they're pretty useless in most of Judah and Israel because the country is so hilly that they can't be used.

But what he does to show that he's rebelling is he withholds the tribute. And he was supported in this by the leaders of his country, many of the leaders, who thought it's really hard to carry out a reform, while we're under the yoke of Assyria.

How are we going to really reform the temple when we've got that Assyrian altar there? And if we take it out, that would obviously be seen as an act of rebellion. And the popular theology at that time really emphasized the covenant to David, which said, I will have a king forever that will sit on that throne.

One of your descendants will forever sit on that throne. And they emphasized the temple. And they thought that the monarchy and the temple were things that God had to support.

[31 : 59] That God had declared his unconditional support for those. And so they were thinking, well, you know, we have a pretty good chance here.

God did not pay attention to Judah and Israel on these little western places immediately because he was putting down a rebellion in Babylon.

But after two or three years, he turned his attention to Israel and Judah, came in with his army, and crushed the rebellion. And he was really ruthless. He totally destroyed Tyre, Ashdod, Ekron, and he said he destroyed 46 fortified cities in Judah.

This is from the Assyrian records. And the country was really devastated. They found actually what seems to be a mass grave in Lachish, which is mentioned in this story.

1,500 bodies, they figure, were put into that mass grave. And on top of it was some of the garbage of the Assyrian army, like their pig bones and other things that would not have been garbage from Israel or Judah.

[33 : 20] What happens after Sennacherib comes is a little unclear. And I guess this is one of the things that makes us a little reticent to say this is actual history in the sense that we think of chronological history.

Because there's one account that says Hezekiah surrendered and had to pay this huge, huge tribute. And then there's another one that says the angel of the Lord slew the Assyrian army and they all went home.

So scholars have sort of attempted to harmonize this and said, well, maybe there were two campaigns, maybe there were different parts of the same campaigns, but whatever happened, it's clear that the rebellion was not successful.

Judah did not become independent. Jerusalem was not destroyed, but it was besieged for three years. And we spent some time in St.

Petersburg and went to the museum where they talked about the siege of Leningrad during World War II. Being besieged for three years is not nice. Isaiah is the prophet at this time, the first really major prophet in Judah, and he was not in favor of any of these wars.

[34 : 44] He was not in favor of Ahaz making overtures to Assyria, he was not in favor of Hezekiah rebelling, he was not in favor of going down to Egypt, he was not in favor of any kind of attempt to get foreign leaders to solve Judah's problems.

And he was a prophet for a long, long time. He was active for about 50 years during the reign of four kings. So he started off during the reign of Uzziah, right at the end of his reign.

You remember probably in the story of his call, it says in the year that King Uzziah died. his son Jotham, Hezekiah's father, Ahaz, and now the reign of Hezekiah.

So he has seen a lot. And the kind of thing he says is, ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evil doers, sons who deal corruptly.

They have forsaken the Lord. They have despised the Holy One of Israel. They are utterly estranged. Why will you still be smitten that you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint.

[36 : 01] From the sole of the foot to the head there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and bleeding wounds. Your country lies desolate, your cities are burned with fire.

In your very presence aliens devour your land. It is desolate, overthrown by aliens. And the daughter of Zion is left, that's Jerusalem, like a booth in a vineyard, like a lodge in a cucumber field, like a besieged cities.

Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom. And in this case, he's actually speaking to Jerusalem. What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices, says the Lord?

I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts. When you come to appear before me, who requires of you this trampling of my courts? I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.

Your new moons, your appointed feasts, my soul hates. They have become a burden to me. I am weary of bearing them. When you spread forth your hands, I hide my eyes from you.

[37 : 04] Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean, remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice, correct oppression, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.

Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land.

But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. And that's basically the message of Isaiah. And he said it to every single king.

And one of the main reasons, we have it written down, is that nobody listened. And he is actually the second writing prophet.

And Amos was the first, and he was from Judah, but he prophesied in Israel. Same thing with Amos. Nobody listened. They said, get out of here. So he went back to Judah and he wrote it down.

[38 : 11] They're documenting. These prophets are documenting what God has said. as we said, the story is also recorded in Isaiah, except for that part right at the beginning where it said what a good king Isaiah was.

That part's missing. I'm sorry, what a good king Hezekiah was. That part is missing from the account in Isaiah. So now we finally get to the part where I thought I was going to spend most of my time, which is the story of Hezekiah and the Babylonian embassy.

And this story also is difficult to fit in exactly. It said, in that time, which is a pretty vague dating, right?

It could have been any time during the reign of Hezekiah. Some scholars feel that this story probably fits in best before Sennacherib actually invades because there's all this plotting going on and Babylon is part of that.

Some people, and we know from historical records that Meridoc Baladan finally got deposed in Babylon in 702 B.C.

[39 : 39] Sennacherib invades later than that. But some people say, well, maybe he's still plotting from his exile to make a comeback, and that's a possibility too. But in any case, he's visiting Isaiah, and what he's really doing is kind of evaluating Hezekiah's suitability as an ally.

Because Babylon at this time is not a great power yet, but they want to throw off the yoke of Assyria, and they're probably the strongest of all the nations that Israel is ruling.

So he's heard about Isaiah being sick, and I'd suggest that he's Hezekiah being sick, and he's sending his embassy to see, first of all, I guess, is Hezekiah in good enough physical shape to actually be of any use to me?

Secondly, does he have the resources? And what Hezekiah does is say, of course I have the resources, here they are, just look at them all, and he takes them through his whole treasury, shows him everything, and at this time it seems like he still has a lot in his treasury, so it may be before he actually had to pay that huge tribute to Sennacherib where he had to totally strip even some of the repairs that he himself had made to the temple, he had to strip off and pay his tribute.

And Hezekiah says, well, Isaiah appears uncharacteristically, he appears after the fact.

[41 : 30] He doesn't appear while the embassy is actually negotiating with Hezekiah. He comes up later, and he says, what happened here?

And the book of Chronicles has an interesting comment on this. It says, and so in the matter of the envoys of the princes of Babylon, who had been sent him to inquire about the sign that had been done in the land, God left him to himself in order to try him and to know all that was in his heart. Isaiah condemns what Hezekiah has done. And he tells him, and this is probably the first mention of a threat of Babylon to Judah.

He tells him, Babylon, whom you tried to work with as an ally, is going to come, devastate your country, deport your population, your family is going to come to an end.

And this is not the first threat to Hezekiah's family, because there is some evidence that even under the Assyrians, some of his daughters were deported as concubines to Assyria.

[42 : 47] But he says, it won't happen in your time. And this is also similar to Josiah, because almost a hundred years later, a similar statement was made to Josiah.

There's no record of Josiah's reaction, but we do have Hezekiah's reaction, and this is it. The word of the Lord, which you have spoken, is good. Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days?

So my question to you is, what do you think of Hezekiah's response? This is a fairly small group today, so I think we have time for your reaction.

It's all about me. Yeah, that's what it seems like, isn't it?

It's all about me. Hezekiah has a lot of experience of countries coming in, so-called allies.

[43 : 57] His father had even more experience. it's all about me. They can destroy the country, they can destroy my family, but I won't see it.

But in defense of Hezekiah, I think we do have to recognize that in the Old Testament, there was really no concept of a day of judgment and restoration and a life after death.

So that if God was going to be seen to be just, it had to happen now. And Hezekiah does say in his prayers, God, you have to save your reputation is basically what he's saying.

You have to save your reputation, even though, and he doesn't put this in his prayers, even though the reason that the Assyrian is here is because I rebelled against him.

against the advice of your prophet Isaiah. Any other comments? Yeah, Sam.

[45 : 09] Well, just how you praise that, that Hezekiah is saying, look, we don't want to show you, God, in a bad light amongst your enemies.

That reminds me of Moses. one, I think, in numerous occasions, but when he came down the mountain with the 10 commandments the first time, and God was going to wipe out all the people. And wasn't it part of Moses' reasoning that, well, you don't want to look like you're not a powerful God in front of all your enemies. So this seems to me like a similar reasoning.

I'm just making the comment. Sorry, not what's on the paper, but what you said. Yeah, and I think that was common reasoning, and I think even something that God accepted, because we do have the record that he came down at least at one point, and we're not sure exactly where, because there's nothing in extra-biblical sources that supports it, but we do know that from kings that he did actually destroy that Assyrian army at one point, and they went home.

And in that instance, God is defending himself, and maybe also showing Hezekiah, look, you don't have to be doing all of this political intrigue, trying to get help from all these foreign powers.

[46 : 38] I can defend you. And this was Isaiah's point. You don't have to do this. A, it won't work. And B, it's not the way I do things.

Yeah, I guess one more thing we could say is that Hezekiah's reforms, at least as they are described in this story, seem mainly to be reforms in the worship.

So that, you got, and that's certainly where, I think probably where you had to start. He got rid of the hill shrines. Everybody came to Jerusalem to worship. The book of Chronicles even says that he reinstated the Passover, which has not been kept in Israel or in Judah for a long, long time.

And same thing with Josiah. The other thing we can say about Hezekiah, and I'm just going to say this, I'm not going to try to interpret, is that the reform really didn't last very long.

It did not outlive Hezekiah. His son, Manasseh, who had probably one of the longest reigns in Israel, more than 40 years, was also one of the worst kings Israel ever had.

[47 : 47] And if you look at other kings, even kings whose reforms were not as widespread as Hezekiah's, usually it lasted sort of at least maybe during the following generation, so that the son walked in the way of his father and in the way of the Lord.

Manasseh was one of the worst kings Judah ever had. He even went so far as to sacrifice his son. And in fact, the book of Chronicles blames him for the fact that Babylon invaded.

I had an interesting conversation with somebody involved. This goes back to our planning, but in the planning process, and somebody said to me, you know, I've been surprised to see how many Christians there are.

This was someone who was a Christian himself. I've been surprised to see how many Christians are involved in this. Christians are used to thinking for the long term.

And maybe that's a good place to end because I think we are. We're thinking beyond the end of time. We are thinking for eternity.

[48 : 58] energy. And it does, I think, give us a different perspective from, you know, will this happen in my time or will I escape?

And not all of us, I think, are going to be able to give a lot of our time and energy to all of these issues. None of us can take care of all of them. But wherever we are, if there's an issue that we are really passionate about, I think, God calls us to do what we can.

At the same time, recognizing that God is in control. And that ultimately, you know, they say man proposes, God disposes.

And ultimately that is true. But at the same time, I think he calls us to be faithful to the way he has called us to live. Maybe that's just a good point to end right there.

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