

“You Alone are God”

2 Kings 18:1-20:21

Key Verse: 19:19

“Now, O Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God.”

Let's begin by reviewing the history of the divided kingdom. After Solomon's reign, in 931 B.C., Israel was divided into two parts: Northern Israel and Judah. Northern Israel lasted for 209 years. It was destroyed by the Assyrian Empire in 722 B.C. Judah endured for 345 years until Babylonian captivity in 586 B.C. How could Judah last 136 years longer than Northern Israel, while surrounded by superpower nations? It was because she was ruled by godly kings, like Asa, Hezekiah and Josiah, who did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. Also, she had great prophets, such as Isaiah and Jeremiah. The last eight chapters are exclusively about the kings of Judah.

Chapters 18-20 are about the reign of Hezekiah. When he began his reign, Judah was poor and weak, like a sick person ready to die. At this time, it would have been easy to seek help from powerful nations surrounding them. But Hezekiah refused to do so. He depended on God alone. When he faced national and personal crises, he prayed to the one true God. God gave him victory. Whether we realize it or not, we face many crises both national and personal. Satan is scheming to devour us. We have many enemies, both apparent and hidden. If we ignore them, we will be devoured as we sleep. We need to wake up and fight the spiritual battle. We can learn how in this passage. We must acknowledge the only true God in our hearts and learn faith that prays like Hezekiah. Then we can have victory over all enemies.

I. Hezekiah leads Judah in spiritual reformation (18:1-8)

Hezekiah was the son of Ahaz, king of Judah. He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. Look at verse 3. "He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father David had done." These are rare words. Among all of Judah's kings, only Asa, Hezekiah and Josiah are mentioned in the same breath as David. (1 Ki 15:11, 2 Ki 22:2) Hezekiah has been called "the second David." His father, the wicked Ahaz, had shut the Lord's temple. (2 Chr 28:24) However, Hezekiah's first act as king was to open the temple doors. (2 Chr 29:3) He realized that his nation's root problem was not economic or military, but spiritual. It was idol worship, which led to corruption and provoked God's anger. He wanted to restore true worship of the Lord as of first importance.

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However, it was more difficult than just opening the temple doors. Verse 4 says, "He removed the high places...." This was a great achievement. In Moses' time, God commanded Israel to destroy the high places, used by the Canaanites to worship idols (Nu 33:52; Dt 12:2). However, Samuel offered sacrifices to the Lord at a high place. (1Sa 9:12 ff.) Solomon also offered sacrifice to the Lord at a high place. (1 Ki 3:4) The Lord had accepted these sacrifices. This might have been tolerable before the temple was built. But then it should have stopped. Yet Solomon built high places for the idol worship of his foreign wives. Jeroboam built shrines on high places when he instituted his man-made religion. Ahaz used high places for idol worship. (2 Chr 28:25) The Lord wanted these high places removed. The legacy of the kings of Judah was measured, in part, by how they handled the high places. The success of otherwise good kings, such as Asa (1 Ki 15:14, 22:43), Joash (2 Ki 12:3), Amaziah (2 Ki 14:4), and Jotham (2 Ki 15:35), is qualified because they did not remove the high places. Worshiping at the high places was a cultural norm, and difficult to challenge. It might be compared to removing Halloween in our own time. Yet Hezekiah removed these high places.

Hezekiah was wise in dealing with the high places, as we can see through reading 2 Chronicles chapters 29-31. Hezekiah first cleansed and repaired the temple of the Lord. Then he held a nationwide celebration of the Passover. It was a spiritual feast. The people who participated were filled with God's grace and deep joy. They remembered the Lord who had brought them out of Egypt. When they were inspired, they willingly removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones, and cut down the Asherah poles. Then Hezekiah broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made. At one time it had symbolized God's help to Israel, and the faith and obedience of the people. However, in Hezekiah's time, it had become a snare; they treated it as an object of worship. Hezekiah did not put it in a museum; he broke it into pieces. This required great courage, for it had been preserved for over 700 years. In this way Hezekiah restored the pure worship of the Lord.

We find wisdom here to work for spiritual revival in America. Instead of directly criticizing idol worship, we should worship the Lord, and help others to worship the Lord. Those who taste the joy and peace of the Lord will gladly smash their idols and return to the Lord from their hearts. This is one reason why we must worship the Lord fervently together in this Christmas season, and invite others to join us.

Still, we wonder how Hezekiah found courage to challenge the deeply rooted compromise of his people. Look at verses 5-6. "Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the

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God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the Lord and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the Lord had given Moses." Hezekiah trusted in the Lord. Throughout Israel's history, God had delivered and blessed them when they trusted in him. Hezekiah decided to trust God from the beginning. Hezekiah also held fast to the Lord. He must have had a conviction that the Lord alone would give him victory. With this conviction, he made a strenuous effort to hold on to the Lord. Faith is not sitting down and thinking God will do something for us while we watch television and eat popcorn. Faith is a decision to please God, holding fast to the Lord in any situation. During Hezekiah's reign, strong winds of opposition were blowing. Inside, Judah was full of idols. Outside, there was a constant threat from Assyria. Hezekiah faced severe trial and difficulty every day. Yet he sought the solution only in the Lord. He held fast to the Lord.

Verse 6 says, "...and did not cease to follow him." Hezekiah did not hold fast to the Lord once or twice and then let go. He did so throughout his lifetime. His devotion was not random, based on the situation. It was constant and steady. Verse 6 also says, "...he kept the commands the Lord had given Moses." Holding fast to the Lord means holding onto the words of God and obeying them. This obedience comes from love for the Lord. Jesus said, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." (Jn 14:23) This is why the author compared Hezekiah favorably with David. Hezekiah loved the Lord and obeyed the word of God from the bottom of his heart.

Then what happened? Look at verse 7a. "And the Lord was with him: he was successful in whatever he undertook." When God is with us, we can be successful in whatever we do. When the Lord supports us--even a little--we can do great things. We may face difficulty, but in the end we will succeed. However, if the Lord is not with us, we will not succeed. We may do well for a while. But in the end, we will fail.

When Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, he didn't fear the king of Assyria. So he rebelled against him. (7b) Also, he defeated the Philistines as far as Gaza and its territory. (8) When Hezekiah loved the Lord, and helped Judah love and worship the Lord, the Lord blessed them to prosper exceedingly, even in the midst of powerful enemies. (Cf. 2 Chr 31:20-21) What really matters is not the situation or the circumstance, but whether the Lord is with us or not. Let's pray that we may worship and serve the Lord alone, so that he may be with us and with our nation.

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II. The Lord defeated Assyria through Hezekiah's prayer (18:9-20:21)

18:9-12 tell that Northern Israel was destroyed by Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, and why this happened. 18:13-16 tell how a later king of Assyria, Sennacherib, invaded Judah. Then, while his army was camped at Lachish, poised to enter Egypt, he sent field commanders to Jerusalem. In 18:17-36, he tried to induce the surrender of Jerusalem. Chapter 19 tells how the Lord defeated Assyria's vast army through Hezekiah's prayer.

First, the Assyrian king insults Hezekiah, Jerusalem and the Lord (18:9-37).

First, the author reminds us why Northern Israel had disappeared. Verse 12 says, "This happened because they had not obeyed the Lord their God, but had violated his covenant...." This was fully explained in chapter 17. Why is it repeated here? It is to show the contrast between Israel and Judah. Israel had fallen, not because they lacked military or economic power, but because they had disobeyed the commands of the Lord. On the other hand, Judah, especially Hezekiah, held fast to the Lord and sought to obey the Lord's commands wholeheartedly. So Jerusalem survived. Nevertheless, the people of Judah suffered much. Sennacherib captured all of the fortified cities. According to the historian George Rawlinson, 46 fortified cities fell and more than 200,000 people of Judah became prisoners of war. Then, only Jerusalem remained. So Hezekiah sent 300 talents (eleven tons) of silver and 30 talents (one ton) of gold as tribute to the king of Assyria. The king of Assyria received the tribute, but did not relent. Instead, he sent his supreme commanders, with a large army, to intimidate King Hezekiah at Jerusalem.

Verses 19-35 are the field commander's threat against Hezekiah and Jerusalem. His words reveal how Satan works. Two things are noteworthy. In the first place, he tried to destroy the relationship between God and his people, and between King Hezekiah and his people, by planting doubt and fear. (19-31a; 32b-35) The field commander knew that Hezekiah had some kind of confidence, since he did not surrender to Assyria. He emphasized that Egypt could not be a source of confidence. That was right. He also said that the Lord, the God of Israel, could not be a source of confidence. That was wrong. Still, he tried to persuade the people of Judah not to believe that the Lord would deliver them. (30) He emphasized that the Assyrian army had already destroyed many people and their gods, even in Samaria. He planted doubt and fear in their hearts. Satan always tries to plant doubt and fear in order to destroy relationships between God, his servants, and his people. We must resist the devil's doubt and fear; then he will flee from us. (Ja 4:7)

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In the second place, the field commander planted false hope. (31b-32a) He promised, "Every one of you will eat from his own vine and fig tree and drink water from his own cistern," if you surrender to me. It was a total lie. The Assyrians were most cruel conquerors. They dragged away captives by putting hooks in their tongues. Likewise, Satan tempts people with false promises. He claims that if people serve him they will enjoy freedom and pleasure. But anyone who listens to the devil becomes his slave. It is the beginning of miserable bondage. Sometimes the devil tempts us to give up the life of faith, promising that a carefree life, full of fun awaits us. He urges not to struggle with the word of God or serve others, but to enjoy our own pleasure and comfort. However, the Bible says there is no carefree life in the world; there is no life without suffering. This is the devil's false promise.

How did the people of Judah respond? Look at verse 36. "But the people remained silent and said nothing in reply, because the king had commanded, 'Do not answer him.'" 2 Chronicles 32:7,8 reveal that Hezekiah said: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because the king of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him. With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles." The people gained confidence from Hezekiah's words. When Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, he could help his people trust in the Lord. They became one in spirit. Then they could fight together against their real enemy by faith in God.

We Christians are fighting a spiritual battle against the forces of Satan every day. Satan tempts us to fear and doubt, and makes false promises. He tries to entice us to surrender to him without fighting. We must resist this temptation by trusting in God's truth and promise. We must also trust one other as God's servants. Then, with one spirit we can resist the devil's temptation and carry out the Lord's mission to evangelize the world.

Second, Hezekiah's prayer for deliverance and the Lord's answer (19:1-37).

When Hezekiah depended on God, he might have expected everything to go well. However, the reality was quite different. He was in deep trouble. He could have doubted God's love, giving up on God. But he did not despair. Rather, he grew in faith all the more. What did he do at this time of crisis?

Look at verse 1. "When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of the Lord." Hezekiah went there to pray. Moreover, he sent his servants to the prophet Isaiah and asked him to pray. He decided to overcome this national crisis through prayer. He believed that the Lord

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could change the situation no matter how bad it was. He believed that the Lord gives victory to those who trust in him. He believed that prayer was the only solution.

In verses 3-4 Hezekiah described the desperate situation. Figuratively, speaking, it was like a mother coming to the point of delivering a baby, and having no strength left. At that very moment, she must cry out to God for help, as a matter of life and death. Still, Hezekiah's prayer was positive. He knew that the king of Assyria had ridiculed the living God. His heart burned with holy anger; he hoped that the Lord would rebuke the king of Assyria, and deliver the remnant of Israel.

The Lord answered Hezekiah's earnest prayer immediately through Isaiah. Isaiah told him not to fear the harsh threats of the Assyrian king (6b-7). It was the Lord whom he had insulted. The Lord would deal with him. The Lord would deliver Hezekiah and Jerusalem. The Lord said that he would send the king of Assyria back to his own country, where he would be cut down with the sword. The Lord God cannot be mocked. The Lord God punishes mockers and delivers the godly. When we hear about terroristts who are operating within our own borders, we can be afraid. However, when they mock the Lord God, they are inviting disaster upon themselves. We need not be afraid; God will deliver the godly from their hand.

What happened? First the field commander withdrew to join the king of Assyria at Libnah. Then the king of Assyria heard that the king of Egypt, Tirhakah, was marching out to fight him. The Assyrian king was becoming desperate. He could not commit to a long-term seige of Jerusalem. They would have to withdraw. Nevertheless, the king of Assyria made one last attempt to threaten Hezekiah. He sent a letter claiming that God was not trustworthy. He compared the God of Israel to the idols of other nations. He was telling Hezekiah, "It is useless to trust in God. Surrender, or else...."

How did Hezekiah respond to the letter? He went up to the temple and spread it out before the Lord. Then Hezekiah prayed. Look at verse 15. "And Hezekiah prayed to the Lord: 'O Lord, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.'" The God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, is the God who dwells with his people in the temple. Once, Isaiah went into the temple and saw the Lord, seated on a throne, high and exalted. The Lord was so holy that mighty angels covered their faces and said, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." (Isa 6:3) This holy God was present with his people Israel. This holy God cannot be compared to mundane things. He is the Sovereign Lord over all

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kingdoms on earth. He was ruling Assyria, Egypt, Babylon, and all nations precisely as he pleased. Their destinies were in his hand. This holy God made heaven and earth and all things out of nothing. When he said, "Let there be light," then there was light. (Gen 1:3) He created the Milky Way galaxy with its millions of stars. He created all human beings, each one unique, each with his own fingerprint. He created all the animals and plants and trees, and the seas with all the fish in them. This God is the living God. This God can do anything. Nothing is impossible with God. Sennacherib had insulted this holy, almighty, living God. (16) Now he would have to deal with God.

Look at verses 17-18. Hezekiah admitted that the Assyrians had destroyed many nations and thrown the gods of the conquered people into the fire and burned them. It was because they were not gods, but only wood and stone fashioned by men's hands. They might have looked glittering and mysterious, but they were nothing. The God of Israel is not like man-made gods. He is the living God who created all things according to his will.

Hezekiah prayed to this living God. Look at verse 19. "Now, O Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God." Hezekiah prayed for deliverance, not only so that Jerusalem would be spared, but so that God's glory would be revealed in all the earth. Many people do not know the Creator God. So they make their own gods--gods which cannot save them. Hezekiah wanted all peoples on earth to know God, the only true God. The Lord alone is worthy to receive honor, glory, praise and worship from human beings.

What does this prayer mean to us: "You alone, O Lord, are God." It means that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the only true God. He sent Jesus to die on a cross and rise again to save us from our sins and to give us eternal life. We can accept Christ, or reject him. If we accept Christ, he saves us and blesses us abundantly. If we reject him, we perish; there is no other way of salvation. Peter said in Acts 4:12, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven, given to men, by which we must be saved." We must have faith in Christ alone.

Verses 20-34 contain Isaiah's poem of victory over the king of Assyria. The king of Assyria was foolish. He boasted of his achievements in verses 23-24, repeating "I," again and again. He thought he was really something. However, he was nothing. He was merely the instrument of the Lord. The Lord had ordained everything he did long before. The Lord knew everything about him, even the rage that he carried

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in his heart toward the Lord. Because of this, the Lord was going to put a hook in his nose and a bit in his mouth and pull him back to his own land like an animal on a leash.

Verses 29-31 are the Lord's sign of hope for Hezekiah. The hungry people of Jerusalem would have food to eat from what grew by itself for the next two years. After that, they would sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat their fruit. Judah would be completely restored. More than that, the Lord would preserve a remnant for his salvation work in Jerusalem. How would it happen? The zeal of the Lord Almighty would accomplish this. (31b) The Lord promised that the king of Assyria would do nothing to Jerusalem. He would not enter it, he would not shoot an arrow at it or build a siege ramp against it. The Lord would defend Jerusalem for his sake and the sake of David. (34)

What happened after Hezekiah prayed? Look at 19:35. That very night the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrian soldiers. The Assyrian army was destroyed. Sennacherib was completely defeated. He had to break camp and withdraw. He returned to Nineveh, where he was killed by his two sons as he worshiped his idol. This is exactly what the Lord had prophesied through Isaiah. In this way the Lord delivered Hezekiah and Jerusalem, gave them victory, and gained glory for himself throughout the whole world.

Third, Hezekiah's prayer for healing and the Lord's answer (20:1-21). After Hezekiah had won victory over the outer enemy, an inner enemy was waiting for him. He became ill and was at the point of death. Hezekiah was still young, about 39 years old. Yet according to the word of the Lord through Isaiah, he was not going to recover. What did Hezekiah do? Look at verses 2-3. "Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, 'Remember, O Lord, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.' And Hezekiah wept bitterly." Hezekiah pleaded with the Lord to remember his lifetime of devotion. Perhaps Hezekiah wept because he had no son to succeed him. Anyway, the Lord listened to his prayer. The Lord loved him and had mercy on him. So the Lord healed him and added fifteen years to his life. The Lord made the shadow go backward ten steps on the stairway of Ahaz. It was a miraculous sign. Three years later, Manasseh was born. He was a problem child. Yet David's line was maintained.

Hezekiah had overcome the Assyrian threat through prayer. Hezekiah had been healed of a life-threatening illness through prayer. He had received a miraculous sign as well. Now his nation was strong, he was strong, and he had a son. He was

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highly regarded by all the nations. Many people brought offerings for the Lord to Jerusalem, and valuable gifts for Hezekiah. (2 Chr 32:23) Hezekiah had very great riches and honor. Most of all, Hezekiah's prayer to reveal God's glory among the nations had been answered.

At this moment, envoys from the king of Babylon came to visit him with letters and a gift. He showed them everything that was valuable in Judah. Perhaps he wanted to make friends with Babylon. However, Isaiah foretold that Babylon would rise and take Judah captive in the future.

What was Hezekiah's response? "The word of the Lord you have spoken is good," he said, for he thought, "Will there not be peace and security in my lifetime." Hezekiah was like a little child before the Lord. He simply accepted God's word and found the positive aspect of it. However, he did not consider the impact on future generations. We should have a sense of history and a shepherd's concern for future generations. Here we learn that it is not easy to finish well, even for a man like Hezekiah. Still, the Lord evaluated his whole life as follows: "There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him." (18:5)

In this passage we learned that Hezekiah trusted in the Lord wholeheartedly. He held fast to the Lord in prayer in times of a terrible enemy threat. Then the Lord saved his country through his prayer. The Lord also healed his illness through prayer and extended his life. He could live in victory because he knew that the Lord is God. The Lord alone is the true God who can save us from any trouble. At this moment, let's come to the Lord, who alone is the true God, for salvation and victory.