

In the Middle of Miraculous

Forgotten Lives . . . Remembered Truths, Part 5

2 Kings 18-20; 2 Chronicles 29-32

If you are old enough in the faith now to have read through your Old Testament, you've discovered the biographies of the Kings of Israel – as well as other nations.

Some of them are still famous to this day. Most people – even outside the faith – know a little bit about King David; even more perhaps about his wealthy and famously wise son, Solomon.

Some within the church know about Ahab and Jezebel, his wicked wife who threatened the Prophet Elijah's life.

These biographies read like bestselling novels at times – filled with intrigue and suspense.

Now, you can easily tell how important a king was to the biblical record by how much space is allocated to them. David, Solomon and Ahab got the most newspaper coverage of all.

The next king to have received a great deal of attention – but has altogether been forgotten – is a king by the name of Hezekiah.

Sections of his biography appear in the Book of 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles and – one of his poems even appears in the Book of Isaiah.

What I love about Hezekiah's biography is the unfiltered look God gives us at several issues that still challenge the believer today.

Issues where Hezekiah succeeded like:

- How to pray when you're terrified and everyone around you is panicking;
- How to live for God when it makes little sense;
- Or, how to change a legacy of unfaithfulness modeled by an ungodly father. In fact his father, King Ahaz, was

so wicked the Israelites refused to bury him in the royal graveyard of the kings.

Now Hezekiah wasn't perfect . . . there were issues where he failed as well . . . God provides all of it in several chapters of inspired scripture.

We'll have time to touch down on a few of them.

Let's begin at **2 Kings chapter 18**. *Now it came about in the third year of Hoshea, the son of Elah, king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah became king. 2. He was 25 years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years. Notice verse 3. He did right in the sight of the Lord.*

And by the way, that was surprising news.

You would think that a 25 year old who finds himself at the top of a fortune 500 company, having watched his wicked father live in the lap of luxury and deny himself absolutely no pleasure – you would think that this would be another story of "life father, like son."

So when you read here that Hezekiah *did right in the sight of the Lord* – that was wonderful news – and the news spread throughout the kingdom.

Notice we're told that he destroys all the false religious practices within his kingdom – no matter how much money, buildings and occupations were involved.

So you can also rest assured he didn't have court officials, religious leaders, or perhaps even family members cheering him on.

Let me draw an observation here at the very outset of Hezekiah's reign:

- **The absence of a godly father does not eliminate the possibility of a godly son.**

You might remember that Paul encouraged the wives of unbelieving husbands living in Corinth, not to abandon their families but to stay with it, becoming in that household a holy and sanctifying influence (*1 Corinthians 7:14*).

And what a difference one wife and mother made by the name of Eunice – a Jewish woman who for some unknown reason married an unbelieving Greek man and they had a son named Timothy.

We're specifically told that somewhere along the way, Eunice and her mother Lois committed themselves to the God of their fathers and taught Timothy the scriptures at a very early age.

All through those early years – you can just imagine – Timothy's father would have worked in the garden or gone fishing on the Sabbath Day while Eunice and Timothy went to the synagogue.

People might have whispered to each other in the Synagogue, "This young boy will probably not amount to much, given the pagan father his mother chose to marry."

But you discover that when Timothy grows up and becomes a leader in the New Testament church – in fact, the pastor/teacher in the Church at Ephesus, you can only wonder at how different he would have been from his idolatrous father.

The same thing is happening here.

While growing up, Hezekiah's example of a man was an ungodly father. He never had the opportunity to see his father pray or quote one of the many sayings of his predecessor King Solomon;

Hezekiah never saw his dad make a tough decision that would honor God; he never had the privilege of hearing his father comment on the glory of the Temple worship – of the blessing of the prophet's sermons – and by the way, Isaiah was the prophet who just so happened to be doing the preaching during these days.

Imagine that.

The only thing Hezekiah probably ever heard his dad say about Isaiah would have been something disparaging, or negative, or worse.

But here's the good news. In the sovereign grace of God, the absence of a godly father – which is always incredibly helpful and in fact, it is the ideal of God for the home – the absence of one does not eliminate the potential of a godly son – or daughter.

Maybe you're one of them.

You are the first person in your family – for generations – whose eyes were opened by the grace of God to begin a legacy of faith in gospel truth.

But you never had anyone cheer you on from your family when you did. Can I cheer for you, right now – praise God and hallelujah for your salvation . . . in fact – STAND!!!!

When you read here, *Hezekiah did right in the sight of God* . . . that might be where you can identify with Hezekiah in a powerfully encouraging way.

Now, Hezekiah isn't just letting people know he's in sympathy with the God of Israel – in verse 4 we read that he ordered a demolition team to break down all the false temples and places of false worship.

And get this – he is willing to do one other thing that no king before him had ever done . . . which hints at some compromise in the lives of kings before him – even godly kings – notice the *middle part of verse 4: He also broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the sons of Israel burned incense to it.*

You got to be kidding.

This goes back to the Book of Numbers chapter 21 where you can read the story of Israel's unfaithfulness and the plague of serpents that God sent into their midst. Moses cried out on their behalf and God instructed him to craft a serpent of bronze and mount it on a pole and hold it high in the air. Anyone who looked to that bronze serpent would be healed.

Centuries later, Jesus Christ will reveal that this event in Old Testament history was a foreshadowing of the lifting up of His own body on the cross as the cure for the terminal disease of sin for all who look to Him (John 3:14).

But let me tell you, just having come back from Israel – I am so glad nobody knows exactly where that cross was suspended – they would have built a shrine and started offering incense to it. The religious systems of our world have done that in Israel at just about every other site.

Frankly, it's human nature to honor something physical – tangible; and ignore something spiritual – invisible . . . such as our invisible Lord and Savior who desires to be worshipped without superstition and mysticism but in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

2 Kings 18 informs us that for 700 years, the Israelites had kept this bronze serpent and by the time of the kings, there was some sort of shrine to the serpent and people were burning incense to it . . . they had religious ceremonies and more than likely

traditions . . . pilgrimages . . . bowing and groveling and candles too.

And I love this . . . Hezekiah effectively destroys 700 years of silly superstition. He effectively destroys a sacred cow – he just makes barbecue out of it.

But keep in mind that he didn't make many friends when he did it – especially all the incense manufacturers and the religious leaders who charged fees at their little shrines where they burned their little candles.

Here's is this 25 year old king – the son of a wicked man, who'd grown up surrounded by immorality and idolatry – and when he takes the throne, he brings the people back to God.

Would you notice his personal testimony, recorded by the Chronicler of the Kings – **verse 5 – He trusted in the Lord.**

The word literally means, “he leaned all his weight on the Lord.”ⁱ

One author commented on this phrase by writing, “he knew so little about God compared to what we know about God, but he leaned entirely on Him, even though he knew so little; we lean so little on Him, when we know so much.”ⁱⁱ

Isn't that good?

I happen to believe he had no one else around him, especially at first, in the court of the Kings, on whom he could lean.

So he leans all of his heart and life on his true and living Lord.

Notice **verse 6 – he clung to the Lord.** Like a desperate man clings to life preserver in a rushing river, Hezekiah is hanging on for dear life, as he clings to His strong and mighty God.

And he doesn't just plan on surviving.

Hezekiah is determined to lead his nation back to God.

If you'll turn forward to the book of 2 Chronicles, and to chapter 29, you can survey 3 entire chapters of nothing less than stunning, spiritual, courageous changes.

In **chapter 29** he begins his reforms.

Let me survey all that happens, for the sake of time – I'll point out something in chapter 31.

- But in chapter 29 He reopens the doors of the temple, which his father had closed – effectively ending the sacrificial system of Israel.
- In this same chapter, he leads the Levites and priests back into the city to sanctify

themselves and begin their ministry again in the House of God

- Beginning at **verse 20** he reinstates the prescribed worship of Yahweh
- He reinstates the sin offerings as **chapter 29** closes
- He celebrates the national Passover feast to the Lord God of Israel as **chapter 30** opens
- He sends out letters inviting all the divided tribes representing Israel and Judah to come and celebrate together again the feast of Passover in Jerusalem
- **Chapter 31** shows him destroying all the false temples and false idols
- As **chapter 31** ends, Hezekiah is doing nothing less than restoring the people to the Law of Moses and the worship of God as God had commanded.

Just look at **verse 20 of chapter 31. Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah; and he did what was good, right and true before the Lord his God. 21. Every work which he began in the service of the house of God in law and in commandment, seeking his God, he did with all his heart and prospered.**

I mean, what a godly reformer king!

So what in the world is God going to do to bless the sandals off this guy . . . it's been years . . . and now the Temple is humming and the worshippers are returning!

I mean, how will God treat such a faithful and godly man like Hezekiah?!

Let me show you, **Chapter 32 and verse 1. After these acts of faithfulness, Sennacherib, king of Assyria came and invaded Judah and besieged the fortified cities.**

Um . . . maybe I missed something . . . let me read that again – **After these acts of faithfulness . . .** Sennacherib invaded Judah – he surrounds the city and plans to kill many of them and take the rest of into bondage.

Before we watch Hezekiah's nation basically erupt in panic, which is understandable, let me make another observation from this man's biography – maybe you've discovered the same thing is true in your own life.

- **Trusting God in times of trouble does not eliminate the possibility of even greater trouble.**

Isn't that a wonderful truth? You just want to put that on your refrigerator.

Trusting God in times of trouble doesn't eliminate the possibility of even greater trouble. Or to put it another way, Walking with God doesn't guarantee an easier walk.

This already hadn't been easy for Hezekiah . . . with his own family and tribe and nation.

Now here come the Assyrians – led by a butcher of a king called Sennacherib.

Listen to Sennacherib boast in an open letter to the nation Israel:

v. 10. "Thus says Sennacherib king of Assyria, 'On what are you trusting that you are remaining in Jerusalem under siege? 11. Is not Hezekiah misleading you to give yourselves over to die by hunger and by thirst, saying, "The LORD our God will deliver us from the hand of the king of Assyria"? - verse 13 – Do you not know what I and my fathers have done to all the peoples of the lands? Were the gods of the nations of the lands able at all to deliver their land from my hand? - verse 15 – Now therefore, do not let Hezekiah deceive you or mislead you like this, and do not believe him, for no god of any nation or kingdom was able to deliver his people from my hand or from the hand of my fathers. How much less will your God deliver you from my hand?" – verse 17 – He also wrote letters to insult the LORD God of Israel, and to speak against Him, saying, "As the gods of the nations of the lands have not delivered their people from my hand, so the God of Hezekiah will not deliver His people from my hand." They called this out with a loud voice in the language of Judah to the people of Jerusalem who were on the wall, to frighten and terrify them, so that they might take the city.

And the people *were* terrified, by the way. Other city officials will beg Hezekiah to surrender . . . there's no way to win.

He's stuck in the middle . . . between wanted to do what's right and what seems logical.

He has no idea of the miraculous work of God, already prepared on his behalf. But it was sheer panic in Jerusalem.

But Hezekiah did do something – he turns to praying. In fact, the implication in *verse 20* is that only two men were interested in praying – the prophet Isaiah and king Hezekiah.

If I could travel back to certain moments in Biblical history, this would be one of them. The

record of **2 Kings** informs us that Hezekiah eventually goes alone into the Temple and he takes this letter from the Assyrian king – in fact, ***turn back there to chapter 19; in verse 14 he takes the letter*** – the Hebrew word, by the way, is plural, indicating several leather or papyrus scrolls in the letter . . . he goes into the temple and notice, he ***spreads all of these pages out before the Lord.***

I love that expression – ***he spread it out before the Lord.***

Isn't it true that we most often tempted to lay the pages of our panic before others . . . we take the scroll of our suffering and lay it before our friends or our family.

Watch Hezekiah here – desperately alone – spreading this letter out before his living Lord as if to say, "Lord, you've got to see this for Yourself . . . read what this blasphemer is saying about You."

You want to know how to pray when you're desperately alone? Here it is – ***verse 15, "O Lord, the God of Israel, who are 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 listen to the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God . . . verse 19, Now, O Lord our God, I pray, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone, O Lord, are God."***

In the next few verses Isaiah the prophet shows up and effectively tells Hezekiah that God heard his prayer.

God knew what was in those letters too.

As the chapter ends – ***notice verse 35*** – we're told that the angel of the Lord goes out and kills 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, without waking anybody up.

Hezekiah might have felt like he was stuck in the middle . . . but in reality, he was really in the middle of miraculous.

God was at work all the time . . . God intervened and Judah was miraculously spared.

If I could draw two more observations from this portion of Hezekiah's biography, it would be these.

- 1. Our motive in praying is as important to God as our need.**

As Hezekiah's prayer echoed around that Temple courtyard, his motive was abundantly clear – ***verse***

19 again, Now, O Lord our God, I pray, deliver us from his hand so that [I'll have a kingdom to rule – so that my life will settle back down – so that we can get back to life as we once knew it – oh no, notice,] so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone, O Lord, are God.

Why do we pray?

Some time ago a man in our church sent me this email – a rather funny story of a woman in a church who owned a parrot. Trouble was, the only thing her parrot would ever say were the words, “Let’s kiss, let’s kiss.” It embarrassed this woman to no end when people from church came to visit her . . . parrots learn what to say from their owners, right – there was no way she could convince people this wasn’t the case – every time someone came over, this parrot would say, “Let’s kiss!”

Her church got a new pastor and she was thrilled to learn that he had a parrot too – only his parrot repeated the words, “Let’s pray.” Which is a good thing for a pastor’s parrot to say. She knew this was the answer, so she explained her dilemma to the new pastor and then arranged a day to take her parrot over and leave it for the day – that’ll solve the problem. Well, as soon as she brought her parrot over and put her in the bird cage with the pastor’s parrot, sure enough, her parrot immediately started saying, “Let’s kiss, let’s kiss.” The pastor’s parrot said, “My prayers have been answered.”

How many of you are thinking, that’s the oldest joke in the book.

Well then send me new stuff.

I thought it illustrated the problem fairly well. We might be good at repeating the words, “Let’s pray!” The question is what are we praying for?

What do we really want from God – take my life and get me back to the way it used to be . . . settling my little kingdom back down so everything’s calm and comfortable.

God is not nearly as interested in delivering us as He is in developing us.

And when you are desperately alone; and your castle is surrounded, the character of God is going to be developed by means of your crisis.

The character of God is going to be demonstrated to you and developed in you, by means of your desperate crisis. And the more desperate your crisis, the more development there will be taking place in your life.

In his book entitled *Come Before Winter*, Chuck Swindoll writes of the value of pressure and tension.

He discovered something interesting and wrote about it in a chapter he entitled, “Tension in the Tank”.

In the northeastern United States, codfish are not only delectable they are a big commercial business. There is a market for eastern cod all over, especially in sections farthest removed from the northeast coastline. However, the public demand poses a problem to the shippers.

First, they froze the cod and then shipped them elsewhere. But the freeze took away much of the flavor. So, they experimented with shipping them alive in tanks of seawater. But that proved even worse. Not only was it more expensive, but cod lost its flavor and, in addition, became mushy and soft. Their texture was seriously affected.

Finally, some creative soul solved the problem in a most innovative manner. They codfish were placed in large tanks of water along with their most irritating enemy, the catfish. From the time the cod left the east coast until it arrived at its westernmost destination, those ornery catfish chased the cod all over the tank.

As you might have guessed, when the cod arrived at the market, they were as fresh as when they were first caught. There was no loss of flavor, nor was the texture affected.

Then Swindoll applies this discover by writing, A couple of questions are worth asking. First, can you name some catfish swimming in your tank? Maybe you live with one of them. Is it somebody at work whose irritating presence drives you to your knees several times a week? Every church family seems to have a catfish or two as well. They are there to keep all the cod from getting soft and tasteless.

Just think – it is that tension in the tank that helps the image of Christ emerge; with the right attitude, we can learn how to keep from resenting them as intruders, as the chase continues. To do so, we will need to put an end to pity parties and whine clubs and gripe gatherings.

When we do, it is nothing short of remarkable how closely the chase begins to resemble the race.ⁱⁱⁱ

The second observation I want to make from this man’s crisis of faith and trust is this; not only is our motive in praying as important as our prayer request; secondly,

2. Prayer is not a quick transaction - it is a close interaction.

For most of us, and for most of the time, we view prayer as a transaction between us and God. We go to Him with our needs - we have our requisition form filled out with all the facts.

I ordered some books a couple of days ago online; I filled out the order, then they asked me to choose the delivery method – did I want it shipped standard fare – 5-7 business days; or shipped overnight – that would cost the most, but I wasn't in a hurry, so there was no need to pay extra.

Unfortunately, this is how we deliver our prayers – Lord this is what I need and here's my shipping delivery schedule . . . it can wait 5-7 days . . . or, no, better deliver it overnight.

I've been really good lately . . . I even went to church on Sunday night – that's worth a lot of points, you know . . . so Lord, go ahead and deliver my answer overnight.

Prayer is not an online transaction - it is a personal interaction. And we really need the interaction more than we need the transaction.

George MacDonald wrote with these perceptive words about what we really need most anyway; “What if the main object in God's idea of prayer is a supplying of our great and endless need of Himself. Hunger may drive the runaway child home, and he may or may not be fed at once, but he needs his parents more than his dinner. Communion with God

is the one need of the soul beyond all other need; and prayer is the beginning of that communion . . .”

Let me close by suggesting that the biography of Hezekiah is a lot more like yours than you might have imagined.

Faithfulness to God isn't inherited – it isn't passed down from father to son – it's captured, it's resolved, one person at a time

And every so often, as we've observed in the biography of Hezekiah, when God does demonstrate His power or His provision, we rediscover at times that we are actually living in the middle of miraculous.

We just don't see . . . we miss so much . . . but God is at work all around us . . . in your life and mine . . . right now as much as He was 4,000 years ago.

And the lessons remain the same . . . among them – when everyone else panics . . . pray. Spread it out before the Lord. He's already at work in shipping you a response . . . it'll arrive when He wants it too . . . and more than likely, there are catfish included in His answer.

And as we trust Him, just maybe, in some big or small way, the kingdoms around us will come to know that our He alone is the Lord, our God.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 3/8/2015 by Stephen Davey.

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i Russell Dilday, Mastering the Old Testament: 1, 2 Kings (Word Publishing, 1987), p. 432

ii Ibid

iii Charles R. Swindoll, Come Before Winter (Multnomah, 1985)