

Dr. John Oswalt, Kings, Session 27, Part 1

2 Kings 18-19, Part 1

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We're looking at 2 Kings, chapters 18 and 19. I've titled it, Hezekiah, Man of Trust. It's so fascinating the way we sort of go back and forth in Judah.

Uzziah seems to have been a good man, but he is followed by Ahaz, his rotten grandson. And Ahaz is followed by Hezekiah, a good man. And then Hezekiah is going to be followed by Manasseh, the rottenest of them all.

So, it's fascinating to see this back and forth. But here we have Hezekiah. As I mentioned in the background, there is misunderstanding, disagreement about his precise dates.

Normally, when there is a co-regency, the total years of a king's reign will be from when he started as co-regent until he died or was killed or whatever. And that has worked very well up to this point. But something goes wrong here.

We're told very clearly that Hezekiah began as king while Israel in the north was still in existence in the third year of the last king, Hoshea, which would have been 728 or 727. But then we're told the length of his reign, and that doesn't work. So, it looks as though, in this case, they started counting his years on the throne from when his father Ahaz died in 716.

So, it's just a little back and forth there about the actual dates. But it seems to me unmistakably clear that he was on the throne when the north fell. And he's very active in then calling for the northerners who remained after the Assyrians hauled some of them off into exile, calling them to join the Judeans for a great Passover.

And so all of that plays into all of this. Isaiah had told Ahaz, don't trust Assyria. Don't send a king's ransom to those people.

If you do, the day is going to come when Assyria is going to flood you right up to the nose. A great flood swept over the land. And in fact, that's exactly what has happened.

It is the date 701, and the Assyrian emperor Sennacherib came. Sennacherib tells us that he captured 46 fortified cities. These would have been fortified villages from our perspective.

Finally, only two fortresses remain standing in the land. I had the map to show you, but you'll have to put up with my map. One of those fortresses was Jerusalem.

The other one was the city of Lachish or sometimes pronounced Lachish. The Assyrians had come down the great coastal highway and had pretty much taken all of the Philistine cities.

They had not come down to Jerusalem because you'd have to come down this ridge, which was not easy. So here they are. They're ready to go on and attack Egypt, but they can't really feel comfortable doing that with Jerusalem in their rear.

Jerusalem would be able to send troops out to cut that road and that wouldn't be a good situation. So, to get to Jerusalem from the south, they've got to take Lachish. Lachish is a great fortress built on a mound.

You have to drive up a ramp to get to the gate, and all of the military technology that could go into building a fortress has done it. So, there is the army, and Lachish is beginning to fail. And so, Sennacherib sends his third in command.

Evidently, he keeps his second in command down there with him but sends the third in command up to persuade Jerusalem to surrender. Now it looks as though Hezekiah had done what Israel and Syria tried to do to Ahaz, and that is he had created a coalition with the Philistines, or he wanted to, and the Ammonites, the Moabites, and the Edomites, and the Termites. No, so he had tried to do this.

The Philistine king had resisted and Hezekiah had captured the Philistine king and had him in prison in Jerusalem. So, this is more than just a matter of conquest. It's a matter of dealing with rebellion.

The Assyrians dealt with rebellion very seriously. So, the attempt is to get the Judean people to force Hezekiah to surrender because Hezekiah will not do this very easily because if the Assyrians get him, he's going to die slowly and horribly. You don't rebel against the Assyrians and live to tell about it.

So that's the situation. Sennacherib would rather that they would surrender the city. Otherwise, he's going to have to put an army up there besieging the city, and who knows how long they might be able to hold out, which costs him a lot of money and time.

So, the issue is, let's get him to surrender. Let's get his people to force him to surrender. And that's what's going on.

So, what does Hezekiah do? Verse 14, Hezekiah, King of Judah, sent this message to the King of Assyria at Lachish. I have done wrong in rebelling against you. Withdraw from me and I will pay whatever you demand of me.

The King of Assyria exacted from Hezekiah, King of Judah, 300 talents of silver, 30 talents of gold. That's about 11 tons of gold. And excuse me, 11 tons of silver and a ton of gold.

So, Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the temple of the Lord and in the treasures of the royal palace. He stripped off the gold, which had covered the doors and doorposts of the temple of the Lord and gave it to the King of Assyria. Okay, whatever you ask, I'll pay you if you'll just go away.

And the King of Assyria says, okay, pay me this. Okay, with that in the background, let's look back at this man, Hezekiah. He was 25 years old when he became king.

Now that looks, when you get all the dates together, looks as though he was 25 when his father died in 716. And that he came as his father's co-regent at a much younger age. He was 25 and he reigned 27 years.

He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. This is verse three, according to what standard? Yes, now you do. Do you remember what we've talked about in the previous Kings? Their fathers.

But this guy has gone back to the measuring rod. So, what's the evidence that he indeed had gone back to the measuring rod? Verse four, what did he do? He removed the high places. Now, do you remember the previous Judean Kings? They were really good.

They really did right things. But, they left the high places in place. As I've tried to say to you, I think those good kings, it was a case of ignorance.

They just hadn't read their Deuteronomy recently. Evidently, Hezekiah not only went back to the standard of David, he went back to the standard of the word. And said, oh my goodness, this is not right.

We ought not to be worshiping Yahweh on these pagan places. Now, I don't think that they necessarily worship idols at this point. They're going to be under Manasseh, Hezekiah's son.

But, they're worshiping Yahweh on these places. As I've said to you, the problem with that is, in the ancient world, that tended to be, well, that's one Yahweh. This is another Yahweh.

That's another Yahweh. You began to split up, God. Well, I worship Yahweh of Hebron.

You poor klutzes, you only worship Yahweh of Bethlehem. And all of that sort of thing. So, he cut down the high places.

He smashed, and he removed the high places. Smashed the sacred stone. Cut down the Asherah poles.

Now, here's an interesting thing. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made. For up to that time, the Israelites had been burning incense to it.

So, this is now 700. The exodus occurred, the early date, in 1400. So, for 700 years, they've been worshipping that bronze snake.

This, by the way, is why the Lord would not allow Moses to lead them into the promised land after he claimed that he could make water with his staff. If they were worshipping this snake, what do you think they would have been doing with Moses? They'd have been worshipping the great God Moses, that's for sure. So, it's not a petty peak on God's side.

Well, you didn't do what I told you. So, I'm not going to let you go in. No, it is.

Sorry, you can't in view of what you have allowed these people to think is your divine ability. So, verse five, Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the Kings of Judah, either before him or after him.

Now, turn over to chapter three, verse 25. This is talking about Josiah 23, 25. Somebody read that, please, nice and loud.

Now, before him, there was no king like him who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might. According to all the law of Moses, nor after him did any arise like him. Okay, now, wait a minute.

We just said there was nobody like Hezekiah before or after. In what sense was Hezekiah unusual? Look at that verse, verse five of 18. His trust, in what way was Josiah outstanding? In his repentance and in his seeking the Lord.

The two verses are not contradictory. They describe two different characteristics. Nobody was like Josiah in repentance, and nobody was like Hezekiah in trust.

It's been said that trust is at the heart of any relationship. Why is that? It sounds like a truism, but why is it so? Okay, how can you relate to somebody? Covey wrote a book entitled Trust, The One Word That Changes Everything. Now, again, let's explore that a minute.

Why does it change everything? What destroys trust? Lies, lies. If you can't trust your spouse, there's going to be a wall between the two of you. You both are going to always be protecting one yourself from the probable lies that your spouse is telling.

Every relationship, this is the bottom line. Every relationship is built on trust. I'm going to commit myself to you because I believe that you will act in my best interests.

And that's the bottom line in terms of our relationship to God. Jerry, I was in Romania at that same time. And they said, we knew that every third person in the country was an informer.

We just didn't know which third person. Now what's happening in our country is the erosion of trust. I was reading an article recently on the amount of theft that goes on in an ordinary business by the workers.

The problem, of course, is, and what has happened is, we had a country where many of the people had an internal gyroscope that said, I will do right whether anybody's watching or not. We've lost the gyroscope. And there aren't enough policemen in the world to force people to do right if they don't have that internal gyroscope.

So here it is, here is trust. Here's what God had been trying to build all through those years. And here's a guy who trusted God.

Doesn't mean he performed perfectly. It's interesting to me in the book of Isaiah and the work that I've done there, Isaiah is a little bit cautious about Hezekiah. That's very interesting.

So, it doesn't mean he does everything right, but he is willing to go out on a limb and say, I'm going to trust God. Something his father had been utterly unwilling to do. And so, the text says this marks him.

This marks him as a very unusual man. Notice verse six: what did he do? He clung to the Lord. Yes, yes.

And that's another Deuteronomic word where Deuteronomy says to love him and fear him, to serve him, and to cling to him. Yes, yes. This isn't just a master-servant relationship.

And it reminds us of Jesus. I no longer call you servants. I call you friends.

Cling to him, cling to him. And so, the Lord was with him, and he was successful in whatever he undertook. But there comes the year.

In his 14th year after having become sole king, here comes Sennacherib. It's only been 20 years since the Northern Kingdom fell, and the border of Assyria was right there. Pretty scary place to be.

So, the fall of Samaria has occurred. Three-quarters of the people of Israel have been deported. We tend to think about the fall of Jerusalem as being the real shocker.

And, of course, it was. But this has to have been a terrible shock as well. What has happened? God made all these promises to all of us.

And yes, that part of us, we're unfaithful, we're disobedient, but what's happened? What's going to happen in the middle of all of that? For those 20 years or so, all those questions are revolving. And now Isaiah's prediction to Ahaz has come true. The Assyrians are right up to here.

So please go away. I'll pay you to go away. But Sennacherib takes the money and doesn't go away.

So here comes the third in command of the Assyrian army with a large army with him demanding that they surrender. Now, this is an example of how well the Assyrians did their homework. His arguments here, which are not very orderly, but he's not interested in an orderly argument.

He's hammering them, and they've done their homework. Part of their homework is he knows Hebrew. Wow, this little country over here.

How much time did he spend? David Bagby is here. He's doing a PhD at the seminary. Takes a while to learn Hebrew, doesn't it? So, look at his arguments and it's very clear.

I've got the NIV here in front of me. They will use words like depending on, relying on that sort of thing. But it's in the Hebrew.

It's trust, trust, trust, trust, trust. This is what, this is verse 19. This is what the great king, the king of Assyria says.

On what are you basing this confidence of yours? You say you have the counsel and might for war, but you speak only empty words. On whom are you depending that you rebel against me? So, number one, you say you have enough strength to defy me. Empty words.

Number two, who are you depending on? Verse 21, Egypt. He laughs, Egypt. Do you know what Egypt is? It's a reed that is already bent.

You're going to use that for a walking stick. I'll tell you what will happen. It'll let go and stab you in the armpit.

That's Egypt. So, you're trusting in your military strategy. Worthless trusting in Egypt.

Worthless. Now, look what comes next. Verse 22: who are we depending on? The Lord.

Hey, well, wait a minute. Wait a minute. I've discovered that I've studied your recent religious history.

Hezekiah got rid of all of Yahweh's local churches. Do you think he's happy about that? No, Yahweh's mad at you. Now we know that, in fact, Yahweh was happy about this.

But I'm certain that there were a lot of people in Judah who weren't happy. You say we got to come all the way to Jerusalem to worship. We used to worship down the road at Mount Zion.

So, he says military strategy, Egypt, the Lord. None of that's going to do any good. Then, interestingly, in verse 22, excuse me, 23 and 24, he says, hey, the really elite military troop at this point is cavalry.

Chariots are beginning to be a little passe, but now we can ride on horses and stay on them and fight from horses. So, he says, I'll tell you what, I'll give you 2000 horses. If you had riders to put on, do you have any trained cavalymen? No.

And then very interesting. Verse 25, Yahweh told me to come attack your country. Well, they try to get him to be quiet, and he says, no, no, I'm going to talk in Hebrew.

So, all these people are listening, sitting on the wall around here. Who is going to have a really bad time when this siege comes along, I can hear what's going on, and he goes on. So, he says, hey, look, don't let Hezekiah deceive you.

This is 29. He can't deliver you from my hand. Don't let Hezekiah persuade you to trust in the Lord.

When he says, the Lord will surely deliver us. This city won't be given in the hand of the king of Assyria. Look, I'll make a deal with you.

If you'll surrender, I'll let you live here for a little while. And then one day, I'll come and take you to a lot better land than this. So, all of this is heavy duty.

The argument is aimed right at these people. So, what's the problem? What's his error? It's not, it's not complicated. He doesn't know the Lord.

He doesn't know what he's talking about. Okay, so he withdraws. We're not quite sure why he withdrew.

Some indication that, finally, the Egyptians had sallied out. And that's what's going on. But can you imagine what the people's attitude was when they saw the Assyrian army withdrawing? What do you think? Relief.

Look back, look over, please, at Isaiah chapter 22. Verses one and two. What troubles you now that you've all gone up on the roofs? Your town so full of commotion.

Your city of tumult and revelry. Your slain weren't killed by the sword, were they? Nor did they die in battle: party time, party time.

Maybe our deal with Egypt finally paid off. And they've withdrawn. And then Sennacherib sends Hezekiah a letter.

Verse nine of chapter 19. Now, Sennacherib received a report that Terhaka, the King of Cush, was marching out to fight against him. So, he again sent messengers to Hezekiah with this word.

Say to Hezekiah, King of Judah, don't let the God you depend on deceive you. When he says, Jerusalem will not be given into the hands of the King of Assyria. Don't listen to God.

Surely, you have heard what the Kings of Assyria have done to all the countries, destroying them completely. And will you be delivered? Did the gods of the nations that were destroyed by my predecessors deliver them? The gods of Haran, Gozan, Rezev, and the people of Eden were in Tel Assar. Where is the King of Hamath or the King of Arpad? Where are the Kings of Lair, Sefer Vayim, Hena, and Iva? And in Isaiah, he says, did the God of Samaria deliver them? Now, look closely here.

What is the conflict? Who were the losers? Whom did the Kings of Assyria depose? The gods. This is a conflict between... It's not a conflict between Yahweh and the Assyrian gods. These Kings say I can take on your God.

I've taken on the gods of every place else, and I've destroyed them. And you think your God's different, huh? This is called chutzpah, which is Yiddish for nerve. Wow, do you think your God can stand up against me any better than any other countries God has?