

Dr. John Oswalt, Kings, Session 28, Part 1

2 Kings 20-21, Part 1

© 2024 John Oswalt and Ted Hildebrandt

Let me talk with you about the strange arrangement of the four chapters that relate to Hezekiah. Now, most scholars today argue that this story of Hezekiah is original to Kings, and Isaiah copied it and did some things to it. I think that is exactly 180 degrees off.

I think, in fact, what the author-editor of the Book of Kings has done is he's pulled from various sources. For instance, I think it's quite clear that he pulled the Elijah-Elisha narratives out and stuck them in his book. I think he has done the very same thing with these chapters.

One of the reasons why, I think I mentioned last week, is 26 times Isaiah uses the Holy One of Israel. Kings uses it once in these chapters. A second reason, though, and the more serious one, is almost everyone agrees that the chapters are out of chronological order.

That is, chapters 18 and 19 relate to the year 701, that date when Sennacherib came to attack Jerusalem. And that is pretty thoroughly nailed down. But almost certainly chapters 20, in particular, comes maybe as early as 712 BC.

I won't go into all the reasons for that, but there's pretty good reason to do that. So, for some reason or other, this earlier event was later included in the chronology of the book. Now, what's going on? In 701, we see Hezekiah demonstrates God's trustworthiness.

Whereas in the earlier experience, maybe as much as 12 years earlier, Hezekiah failed to glorify God. So, actually, in his lifetime, Hezekiah did better as he went along. So why would anybody change that order and make Hezekiah look bad? When he actually, in his lifetime, looks good.

What's going on? There is absolutely no reason for the editor of Kings to have done that. There's no reason why he should have reversed the chronological order of Hezekiah's life. But there is a very good reason why Isaiah would have done that.

This material is in Isaiah 38 and 39. Right before, guess what, chapter 40. Aren't you surprised? Hezekiah has demonstrated the point that all these earlier chapters from 7 on are making.

God can be trusted. Oh, all right then. So, Hezekiah is that child that was promised back here in chapter 9 and then developed further in chapter 11.

Hezekiah is the Messiah. Now, why then might Isaiah put this earlier experience later in the story? Hezekiah is not the Messiah. We've got to look further to find out who the Messiah is.

It doesn't matter how perfectible a human being is. No human being can save the world. That's what's going on.

So, I say that the reordering of his chronology makes perfect sense in Isaiah. It does make sense here. So, I'm confident that the editor has taken this material right out of Isaiah.

He said that's very useful for my point about idolatry, trust, and service. He's taken it right out, whole cloth, and put it in, and he hasn't done any reorganizing.

I think that's what's going on. So, here we find the story. God says you're going to die.

Have a good day. Very, very blunt. It's very striking in its bluntness, I think.

And I wonder why God does that. Put your house in order. You're going to die.

You will not recover. By what in the world? Frankly, I think and this is pure speculation. But I think it is precisely to bring Hezekiah to that place of desperation.

God often does that to us. God often brings us right up face to face with reality. Precisely so that we will recognize there's no hope in me.

I can't solve this problem. I can't do anything about it. If there's to be any hope, it's in God.

Well, actually, that's the kind of thing to do. Because as long as we think, well, with a little help here, I think I can solve this. I'll try a little harder.

Yeah, we'll get this thing to work. Well, that's unfortunate. Better it is, as I say, to come up against a brick wall and say, oh, God.

Unless you intervene, unless you do something here, we're hopeless. I think that's what's going on. Now, I've said this many times over the years.

It was tough being a prophet of God. You know, go tell him he's going to die. Okay, you're going to die.

Hezekiah. Goodbye. See you at the funeral.

He's no more than out the front door before God comes to him and says, go back in there and tell him he's got 15 more years. God, I'm going to look like an idiot. I just said he was going to die.

Who are you working for? Yes, sir. And so, he goes back in. Now, again, I like to talk about this to seminary students.

God is not out to build your reputation. God is not out to make you look good. God has chosen you to be his voice, to speak his word and to be very honest with you as we've seen these tragic failures.

Among leaders in the past weeks and months. I honestly think their success did them damage. Everybody loves me.

I'm the greatest thing since sliced bread. Hezekiah lies on his bed and says, God. If you don't do something here, it's over.

He turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord. Remember, Lord. And this is as we sang in the hymn.

A lovely, lovely statement. I have walked before you walked. I've lived my life with you faithfully.

And with a perfect heart. And have done what is good in your eyes. I've talked a little bit about this with you before.

The King James, as I recall, which is increasingly dangerous at my point in life. But as I recall, uses the word perfect 52 times in the Old Testament. The NIV uses it 21 times.

Has the Hebrew changed? No. English has changed. The word is a whole heart.

Complete. Total. It is not, which is how we have come to restrict the meaning of perfect.

It's a perfect diamond. Absolutely flawless. So, I have a perfect heart.

You boastful liar. You mean in your person. And remember, that's what heart means.

Where you think, where you feel, where you decide, in the core of your being, you are flawless. Give me a break.

No, that's not what the Bible is talking about. The Bible is talking about a person who is completely God's, totally.

No ifs, no ands, no buts. I like the metaphors. Hook, line, and sinker or lock, stock, and barrel.

Totally. That's why I don't like the NIV when it says wholehearted devotion. If you know what the Hebrew is talking about, that's not a wrong translation.

But it weakens the sense of—the core of my being. Hezekiah says.

Belongs totally to you. Not part of it. Not half of it.

Not three-quarters of it. Not seven-eighths of it. All of it.

Now I'm here to tell you tonight. I have a perfect heart for Karen; I'm all hers.

Poor thing, she's stuck with me. Am I a perfect husband? I'm sorry, no. I'm trying.

She's been working very diligently for these 59 years. But my heart is perfectly hers. That's what we're talking about.

You and I. Each one of us can have a perfect heart. Now, the accuser. The accuser will come and say, well, what about this? What about that? What about the other thing? Oh, sometimes he's right.

And we've got to deal with that. But I. Had the opportunity this weekend. David heard me.

To say that my walk with God has been. Sitting beside a swamp with him. And he with a fishing pole.

Now, for about 60 years. And every so often. God gets a bite and reels it in.

And he says, John, what is that? And I say. Search me. He says it looks like a dead cat. Smells like one, too. Could I get rid of that? Yes, Lord. I didn't know it was in there.

Take it. Now, I keep thinking he's going to get to the bottom of the swamp. But he hasn't yet.

But do you see what I'm saying? My heart is his. If there's stuff in there that I don't know about. That I'm not aware of.

I want him to dig it out. But that does not mean. That my heart is any more perfect after he digs it out.

Or was it any less perfect before he dug it out? Perfect is talking about complete. Whole dedication.

Commitment. Consecration. Sanctification.

All his. All his. And clearly.

Hezekiah wasn't lying. God said. I have heard your prayer.

And I have seen your tears. I will heal you. On the third day from now, you'll go up to the temple of the Lord.

I will add 15 years to your life. Now get this. This is one of the keys that we've got the chronology out of chronology.

Chronological order. And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. Oh, he's already done it.

If the chronological order is right. If what I've suggested to you is correct. Then, in fact, this is a prediction.

And very probably. It was the basis for Hezekiah's faith. He could say to the people.

No, we don't have to surrender. God has promised me. He's going to deliver us.

And the rabbi says, don't listen to Hezekiah, who says God's going to deliver you because he can't. So, at any rate, God hears him.

Oh, brothers and sisters. That you and I could at the end of our lives. Speak these words.

I have walked before you faithfully with a perfect heart. And have done what is good in your eyes. How would you like that on your tombstone? And God says you're right.

Perfect performance. No. We've always got to keep that straight.

As long as we're human beings, our performance will be flawed, and so will we who have taught and preached holiness.

Have not sometimes been careful enough at that point. Well, since my heart is perfect. Therefore, my performance must be perfect, too.

You think it isn't, but it is. Ouch. Growth in holiness.

I need to improve my performance and try to understand how the Holy Spirit could do more to make me walk straighter. Yes, yes, yes.

But a heart that is holy is. Create in me a clean heart. David cried.

Yes. Perfectly clean. Pure.

All his. So. In.

Kings. Hezekiah requests a sign in Isaiah.

We don't have the request report. It's simply God gives it.

Now, did the writer of Kings put it in? I think so. If a sign comes up here. Where did it come from? Well, as a guy asked for it.

Why do you think God gave him a sign? And why does Hezekiah ask for one? What do you think? Mm hmm. Mm hmm. Yes.

No, whether you all heard that or not, but. Isaiah challenged King Ahaz to ask for a sign to bolster his faith. And they refused because he didn't want to know that God could help him.

Here, his son Hezekiah. Is willing to ask for a sign. He's willing to have his faith bolstered.

He dares to believe that God will indeed do this. But he'd like to have his faith bolstered in the process. Yeah, I think that's what's going on.

So why this sign? It appears that the language is a little bit tough to know exactly. What is being said? But it appears that the sundial was a set of stairs like that, so in the morning.

The shadow is on this side. And as the sun gets higher. So forth in the afternoon, the sun is there.

So, he says, shall I make the shadow go down? Faster? No, that's too easy. Let's make it go back up. Now, people have argued about this for centuries.

When people thought that the earth went around the sun. Okay, he made the earth go backward. Excuse me, when people think the sun is going around the earth.

I get it right yet. Okay, he made the sun go backward. Well.

There's some cosmological physics here that raised some issues in our minds. About what actually happened to make the shadow move.

But that the shadow moved. I'm perfectly confident whether you call it an optical illusion or whatever.

I certainly don't think the Earth stopped in its rotation and went backward a little bit. That would be fun to see. But maybe a little upheaving.

So, what's the significance of it? The sign. Going backwards.

Of the shadow going backward. To those who show his power to those who have a blameless heart. Yes, clearly, God is showing His incredible power. What about the whole issue of time? I think the point is that time is in the hands of our God. Our times are in your hands.

It says the Bible in one place, and I think it's that sort of thing. If I can give you 15 years ahead, well, the proof is I could take it 15 years back if I wanted to. All of time is in my hands.