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A Long-Awaited Revival II Kings 18:1-37

Intro: After all the wickedness, idolatry of the northern kingdom of Israel and the marginal righteousness, at best, if not outright wickedness in the southern of Judah it's refreshing to hear that a revival is about to get under way. The northern kingdom has been carried off into a long-awaited captivity but the southern kingdom is going to have a reprieve from the madness as a healthy dose of faithful Yahweh worship is going to breakout in the nation of Judah and it's going to start at the very top of the government, with King Hezekiah himself, as should always be the case.

1-8 – A major change has come to Judah with the ascension of Hezekiah to the throne. It's almost as if a new David has appeared! Here is a Judean king who did what was right in the eyes of Yahweh without any qualifications. Other kings before him had done what was right but “not like David” or the high places were still allowed to do business. But this new king employs no half measures: he removes the high places; destroys all the symbols of male deity (pillars) and chops down the symbols of female deity (Asherah). He even goes so far as to crush to bits the bronze serpent that Moses had made in the wilderness (800 yrs prior **Num 21**) because the people were worshipping before it. Such was the poison of Israelite idolatry that, in the end, the bronze serpent stung worse than the fiery serpents.

But, despite all the wonderful religious reforms, the author tells us that Hezekiah's premier virtue was that he trusted in the Lord God of Israel. He then goes on to elaborate on what this trust involved: he held fast to the Lord (clung to = **Gen 2:24**...he shall cling to his wife); he did not depart from following Him; he kept His commandments. This faithful orthodoxy of Hezekiah may seem out of place since his father Ahaz was one of the worst kings of Judah but it makes sense when we realize that Hezekiah was under the influence of the prophet Isaiah all of his life. So, despite having a terrible example in his father, he had a wonderful example of true faith and worship of Yahweh in Isaiah and his influence had a tremendous positive effect on the young prince, and now king, Hezekiah.

Also, because of Hezekiah's faithful trust in Yahweh, the Lord blessed him

thoroughly. Our text says the Lord was with him and he prospered wherever he went. He was so successful he even rebelled against the king of Assyria. The wicked king that his father kowtowed to is now given the royal cold shoulder from Hezekiah. He then swept through the territory of the Philistines and subdued them all the way to their southernmost city.

The most obvious result of Hezekiah's religious faithfulness is that his military exploits parallel those of David's like none of the rest of David's descendents. Among all the Davidic kings it is only said of David and Hezekiah that the Lord was with him and that the king was successful in war. Only David and Hezekiah are said to have defeated the Philistines. As similar as Hezekiah was to David, he was just as completely different from his father Ahaz. Ahaz declared himself to be the servant of the king of Assyria while Hezekiah refused to accept that title for he refused to serve the king of Assyria but rebelled against him. So David reigns again! It was almost too much to hope for!

Consider Hezekiah's reign in light of the previous 150 years. Godly Jehoshaphat's foolish marriage alliance with Ahab's family not only guaranteed wicked kings in Judah for years to come but nearly wiped out the Davidic dynasty altogether. Subsequent kings followed who were doing 'what was right' but not getting too extreme about it. Then Ahaz shows up and it looks like Judah is going to go the way of self-destruction just like the kingdom of Israel had. How amazing after the wretched likes of Ahaz that we now have King David 2.0.

This is fairly typical of God's way with His kingdom and people even today. Whether it's persecution from enemies without or the danger of spiritual rot from within, the church sometimes looks like there's nothing that can stop her destruction. Then God sends a recovery time; a Hezekiah intermission; a breath of fresh air. Sometimes God's relief surprises us, catches us off guard. We've resigned ourselves to a faithless pessimism that believes God abandons His work. If the relief comes then we can only be grateful for it and be prepared to take full advantage of it. If it does not come then we can be grateful for God's daily mercies and be prepared to serve Him in the growing darkness.

The one thing we must not do is make an idol out of God's times of relief. We must not make the misguided mistake of identifying His kind interludes

of relief with the final kingdom of God. In our country it often seems that Christians are more concerned with their freedom to worship than they are with the divine Person who is to be worshipped. We either take our freedom for granted or hold it as a divine right that is our due. We've lived in a 200+ year interlude of peace and spiritual enlightenment but there is no guarantee that it will continue indefinitely and we really have no right to expect to. Look to Judah as a warning – Hezekiah reigns now but Manasseh is coming and the darkness will get darker. We are to be grateful for the goodness and mercy given to us in the present moment.

9-16 – Now, we just went through the fall of the house of Israel in ch17; why do we have a rehashing of all that here in our text? Why do we have to here again about Shalmaneser's conquering of Samaria; the destinations of deported Israelites and the reason for the whole disaster? Likely it's because the writer wants to remind us of the political environment in which Hezekiah pursued his bold policy of rebelling from Assyria. What Assyria has done to Israel they can do to Judah. This emphasizes the gutsiness of Hezekiah's revolt and that's why it's here.

Assyria's response is quick and predictable. They swoop in and take all the fortified cities of Judah. Things now look pretty bad for the home team! But how can this be? If Hezekiah is everything **v1-8** says he is, surely such devotion to Yahweh would be enough to bring God's blessing rather than Assyria's aggression. Now all of Judah's major cities are in Assyrian hands and Jerusalem is the last nut to be cracked. None of this should be happening because Hezekiah has been so...good! How could Jerusalem be in such dire straits when Hezekiah was so righteous?

Well, if you've studied the Bible for any length of time then you shouldn't be surprised at this turn of events. We've seen this before. The text is just teaching that true, obedient faith is not a panacea that shields us from all disaster. You can faithfully cling to the Lord and the Assyrians will still come. In fact, they may very well come because you cling faithfully to the Lord. Jesus even warned the disciples: It is impossible that no offenses should come (**Lk 17:1**). This doesn't nullify the overall promise of blessing and help given to faith and obedience but it recognizes that such blessings can often be diluted with trouble and grief. If this were not so then our faith would be no more than magic.

Many who become disappointed with God have walked in this type of faith. One gives themselves to earnest prayer yet their loved one still dies of cancer and they never pray again. Or one is a diligent worker in the church but is abandoned by their spouse and so they abandon the church. In many cases, the nightly prayers of some are just a kind of religious rabbit's foot. Out text means to correct this mistake for it reminds us that you can be a king who trusts and obeys God and reforms your nation's worship and still your enemy may come and crush your land, deport your people and wait outside the gate to impale your carcass on a stake. It's helpful for our faith to know that.

V14-16 presents another problem faith has: it can cave in. In the face of Assyrian aggression, Hezekiah blinks and tries to buy his way out of a political bind. He drains the temple and royal treasuries, even stripping the gold overlaid on the temple doors. We've seen this before also and **I & II Kings** always takes a negative view of any draining of the treasuries; whether its pilfered by a foreign king; used to bribe a foreign king or buy off a foreign aggressor. So here Hezekiah fails in faith and in wisdom, for Sennacherib takes the cash and still sends his lackeys to demand the city's surrender. Assyria is always a bad investment.

Hezekiah's lapse in faith and judgment seems to contradict everything that's said about him in **v1-8**. How can we rectify these 2 opposing positions? We must realize that **v1-8** is a summary of Hezekiah's entire reign just as **16:1-4** is a summary of Ahaz's entire reign. So the trust and obedience **v1-8** speaks of are what Hezekiah came to have as a result of the whole Assyrian threat. The passage does mention some of his initial reforms but mainly, they're giving an evaluation of his total reign not of a particular failure. There's no conflict between an overall trend of faith that also experiences lapses of faith (David, Abraham, Peter). Faith can have its wobbles and they can be severe. People of great courage and strong faith can crumble. The best prevention is to realize it can happen and pray that it doesn't

17-25 – Here we meet some cheeky Assyrian officials with some funny names. Actually, these aren't their names but rather their official titles. The Tartan was a Field Marshal, 2nd only to the king over the army; the Rabsaris was chief of the royal attendants, a senior administrative official close to the king; the Rabshakeh was chief cupbearer – a high official whose duties

were restricted to court and the king's personal assistant. Clearly, they could speak for the king! But why were they here, in Jerusalem? Hezekiah had paid a hefty fine for Assyria to hit the road but here they are.

Well, it seems Sennacherib was a bit of a scoundrel (he was Assyrian). He had beaten down and run off several other kings before arriving in Judah and was prepared to do the same there. It's possible he was preoccupied with fighting the Egyptians at this time and didn't want to add another fight to his to do list so he sends his emissaries to attempt to convince Hezekiah and Judah to surrender without a fight. So, like Job's 3 friends, these fellows show up with silver tongues and an offer that Hezekiah and Judah couldn't refuse...or so they thought!

The Rabshakeh must have taken a speech class because his first address has 3 distinct parts and is designed to demoralize Judah. The 1st) part of his speech is organized around the theme of trust. It appears 7 times in [v19-24](#) and part of his argument consists of a political ploy ([22](#)). This shows that Assyria had a fine intelligence network. Of course, we know that Hezekiah's reforms pleased Yahweh but the Rabshakeh wasn't concerned with religion, just politics. He rightly figured that not everyone was ecstatic over Hezekiah's reforms. Stirring up some grumbling among Judean elite could only help Assyria's case. He hopes to fan the flames of Judean bitterness over the king's reforms.

2nd) He engages in sheer mockery ([23](#)) by offering Jerusalem a deal: we'll give you 2K horses if you think you can muster enough trained riders for them! You're no match for our 3rd string JV team! His tone here is one of pure scorn. 3rd) He waxes religious and even claims special revelation ([24](#)). The very One in whom Judah trusts is against them! He claims it was Yahweh who told Sennacherib to assault Jerusalem and lay it waste. Assyria is only obeying the will of Judah's God. They were merely being channels for God's will to come to pass against Judah. Of course, the saddest point in the Rabshakeh's speech is his revelation and ridicule of Judah's trust in Egypt ([21](#)). The Egyptian war machine was Judah's hope ([24b](#)). Now, the man wasn't lying. Egypt's unreliability is proverbial in scripture ([Isa 30:7](#); [Ez 29 6-7](#)). In fact, anyone who ever trusted in Egypt suffered for it! We don't know really know if Hezekiah was totally on board with the Egypt compact but there was at least a strong pro-Egypt party in the royal court. Isaiah didn't temper his opinion on the matter either:

he blasted the Egyptian alliance as useless, stupid and idolatrous (Isa 30, 31). “No, come on Isaiah; tell us what you really think!”

It appears that the Rabshakeh seemed to know this too. It's sad when an Assyrian has to teach a believer how flimsy and foolish and fragile is the object of your trust. It's embarrassing when an Assyrian can see that you trust in Egypt more than in your own covenant God. It's sad when Assyrians can expose your folly instead of recognize your faith. An alliance with Egypt was a great temptation for Hezekiah because they were the only ones around strong enough to stand against the Assyrian empire. Isaiah did everything he could to discourage this alliance because Yahweh wanted Judah to out their trust in Him, not Egypt.

In this sense, the Rabshakeh spoke the truth. Yahweh wanted Judah to have no confidence in Egypt at all. But the Rab didn't mention this to bring Judah to a firm trust in Yahweh, Who can and will deliver them from the Assyrians. He said it to completely demoralize Judah and drive them to despair. Satan often attacks us in the same way. Even when he tells the truth (You're a rotten sinner!); he never does it to lead us to a firm trust in our Lord (Jesus died for sinners = He died for me!). Instead, his strategy is always to demoralize us and drive us to despair.

This speech was carefully crafted and delivered for the sole purpose of making Judah give up. That's why the Rab was there at the aqueduct speaking to Hezekiah's officials. He commanded a vastly superior force and could take Jerusalem easily with it but he preferred for Judah to simply give up out of fear, discouragement or despair. The enemy of our souls has the exact same approach. We imagine that he's itching for a fight with us when really; he doesn't want to do battle with us. 1st, there's a strong chance you will win. 2nd, win or lose, the battle may draw you closer to the Lord. 3rd, what the Lord does in your life through the battle can be a great blessing to other people. No, Satan would rather not fight you at all. He'd much rather try to talk you into just giving up!

We see this same strategy used against Jesus during His wilderness temptation. When Satan promised Jesus all the kingdoms of the world in exchange for Jesus' worship, Satan was trying to avoid a fight; he was trying to talk Jesus into giving up! It didn't work with Jesus and it shouldn't work with us!

26-35 – All this time the Rab’s been speaking Hebrew, to the chagrin of the Judean officials. This wasn’t an accident! His primary audience was all those doomed fellows sitting on the wall. “Have you forgotten what a long siege looks like? Look at the menu!” Then he offers them a much better alternative with a much healthier diet. Why put yourself through the meat grinder when you can come out and enjoy the tender mercies of Assyria? Of course, we’ll have to relocate you but that’s not so bad, right? What does it matter where you live as long as you get to live?

In his 2nd speech, the Rab used intimidation to try to foment division. If he can get Jerusalem to capitulate, he’ll save much Assyrian sweat and time. He wants to drive a wedge between the people of Judah and their king. 4 times he seeks to undermine the people’s confidence in Hezekiah’s leadership (**29-32**). Notice how he only refers to the king as just Hezekiah, never as King. If he can get popular sentiment to clash with royal policy, he will get both a city and a possible promotion.

The clencher of his argument is an appeal to logic. The key verb is deliver, appearing 9 times in the Hebrew text and it’s the key word to the Rab’s logical finale (**33-35**). It’s a telling argument that can claim history as its witness. Off the top of his head the Rab rattles off half a dozen hopeless cases. The Assyrian steamroller flattens every nation in its path. No divinity has been able to protect its people from the invincible army of the god Assur. Up to this point the argument has been logically sound and historically accurate. The Rab should have quit while he was ahead because he then blurts out a statement that was completely asinine (35b).

By a leap of false faith and a defect in logic, the Rab assumes that Yahweh is simply another generic deity of a miniscule kingdom who is no match for a world-class empire. Something snapped somewhere when he said that. He needed to check his combat boots because not only had he stepped over a line – he just stepped in it and there wasn’t enough grass in all of Judah to wipe that mess off his feet. He had gone too far. This was the beginning of the end for Assyria. Words have consequences and the Rab’s words will bring dire consequences too for his words mock Yahweh as a no-count deity from some back-water country. Yahweh, who doesn’t give His glory to another, will make sure the Assyrians pay dearly for the Rabshakeh’s logical fallacy.

Judah could've started planning the victory party right then. It's 1 thing to speak against Judah, its people and its leaders. It's another thing altogether to mock the Lord God of Israel this way and count Him as just another god.

