

JULY 2

2 Kings 20:1-22:2

2 Kings 20

It should seem unusual that suddenly we have three whole chapters having to do with Hezekiah. We have had little detail regarding kings like Asa and Uzziah, but here we are being treated to some in-depth treatment of Hezekiah. A person's importance, for good or for bad, is often signaled by the amount of space they receive. Hezekiah was a great king; but his world and his faith got "rocked," and he slipped and fell. This story is here for us as disciples so that we don't slip and fall too.

Vs. 1-11 This appears to have happened just after God delivered Jerusalem from Assyria. Look at 2 Kings 18:13. So this is probably happening later that year. This should have been the time to celebrate. The prospect of dying seems to have challenged Hezekiah's faith. Also, if this happened in Hezekiah's 14th year and he was 25 when he became king, he was now dying as a young man of 39. Many people would find this to be a bitter turn of affairs. Many of us would do the same thing if we were in the same circumstances. The point is, as strong as our faith and walk is as disciples, we don't know how something unexpected might hit us. For one person, impending death doesn't shake them. For another person it shakes them to their foundation. It could be anything - death, threat, financial ruin, sexual temptation, the need for recognition, money, constant aggravation with something, loss of a job, loss of someone we love. In the kings of Judah, we see almost all of these. How these things challenged or ruined their faith are recorded, so that we can learn from them.

V. 3 Not to judge, but I think Hezekiah thought he deserved to live.

V. 8 Why did Hezekiah have to ask for a sign? Did that show how precious his life was to him?

V. 11 I don't know much about physics, but unless this was a trick with angels holding flashlights or mirrors, God did something pretty amazing here. I'll bet He didn't even break a sweat and He didn't break the world.

Vs. 12-15 There may have been several reasons for this visit. Now, it could have been that they cared for Hezekiah, but it might be too that the sun going backwards really got their attention. We will see that the Babylonians were interested in heavenly signs. The other reason these men came to visit Hezekiah was because the Assyrian army had been decimated in trying to attack Jerusalem. They were not only thankful, but they were kind of scouting out the territory. Babylon would become the first great empire in that part of the world. Jerusalem was a long way from Babylon, but it was located strategically between Egypt, Syria and Assyria.

V. 14 Up to this point, we don't have any idea that something might be wrong. In 2 Chronicles 32:23-31 we'll see that Hezekiah really tripped and fell here. What is written in 2 Chronicles ought to strike some fear into any serious disciple.

Vs. 16-19 Although this might seem harmless, we know from other accounts of this event that Hezekiah's words in v. 19 indicate that something was wrong. He was betraying the next generation for peace and comfort in his life. This is something for us to learn. God allowed him 15 more years, so he died at 54.

2 Kings 21

V. 1 Note that Manasseh was 12 when he began to reign. How many years did God grant to Hezekiah when he turned to the wall and wept bitterly? That's right, there would have been no Manasseh if he had died. I heard Walter Martin mention this in a sermon and then he broke into a Yiddish accent and said, "Sometimes, better you should die."

Vs. 1-16 Manasseh brought a curse of judgment upon Judah that God would not forgive. Ironically, Manasseh was the longest reigning king of Israel, northern or southern kingdom. How unbelievable. How tragic. And as much as we have here that is said about Manasseh, there is still more to be said, especially about the shedding of innocent blood. Tradition has it that Manasseh put Isaiah to death by cutting him in two. A magic trick gone bad? The innocent blood was from those who spoke out against him.

In order for Manasseh to reign the longest of all the kings, 55 years, he had to have been a good king, a good administrator. They had prosperity and he was likable. Ok, he killed all of his opponents and anyone who didn't see things his way, filling Jerusalem with innocent blood. Success and having "a way with people," in this case, brought an incredibly hard judgment from God.

But, in 2 Chronicles 33, we'll learn something about Manasseh, really about God, that will blow you away.

Vs. 19-26 Now, it should be no surprise that Amon was evil. His father was a true piece of work, but the story is a little more complicated. What we don't see here is that Amon ruled during his father's absence (Manasseh was on "vacation" in Babylon), and when his father returned, some things changed. Amon un-did the changes and that is why he was killed.

2 Kings 22:1-2

It is funny that these two verses are here today. Maybe The One Year Bible editors wanted to cheer us up. There is a lot to say about Josiah and some of it is supposition on my part. So, bear with me.

Notice how old Josiah is when he began to reign, and what it says about him in v. 2. How did that happen? Possibly his mother, right? Now, go back a little over these numbers. How old would Josiah have been when his grandfather Manasseh died? Now, it might be a good idea to read 2 Chronicles 33:10-23. Something happened to Manasseh which he couldn't pass on to his son, because Amon was already old and set in the ways of his father; but Manasseh might have been able to pass his newfound convictions on to his grandson. I think this is what happened. I think God used the worst king, to influence the best king.

Tomorrow we'll read about Josiah who, in my opinion, was the godliest king of Israel. The Spirit says there was no king like Josiah. Josiah is the only king of whom it is said that he sought the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might. Now David was unique and Hezekiah was unique and both were godly. The context of each of these men defined their unique faith and godliness. Josiah's context is also very unique. As we'll see tomorrow, his challenge was completely hopeless. God said so. Still, he served with an energy and vision that were amazing. Just before the storm struck, Josiah would be a light of grace and would be used by God to save Israel during the exile and to preserve God's redemptive purpose in Israel. It will take a couple of months before all of the pieces fall together, but it will amaze you. You don't get this stuff out of a book or a Sunday school class or even a seminary class. It is the result of reading your Bible year after year after year.

The Lord has put these records here to strengthen our hearts in the harvest. Even an evil man like Manasseh was shown grace and responded, and the small effect of his repentance grew. The Lord knew we would need to read these year after year to inspire us with hope in the harvest. When we feel like giving up, the lives of these men tell us that God's grace is amazing and to keep following our Lord and making disciples.

Acts 21:17-36

Vs. 17-26 Notice that the church in Jerusalem was very heavily burdened by believers who still regarded the law as binding. This might have been more cultural than theological, but the impact

was very oppressive. We tend to think that "liberalism" is the greatest threat to Christianity, but in the NT, it was radical conservatism.

If you want an interesting note on what is about to happen here, look at what Paul says to the Christians in Rome in Romans 15:30-31. He knew what was possible and this prayer was answered...kind of.

Some people think Paul made a mistake by following James' advice, but Paul did keep vows. In 1 Corinthians 9:19ff Paul expressed his freedom to fit in when necessary for the gospel. Knowing Paul, this was not wrong or a mistake. In Acts 23, we'll see this was all according to God's plan. It didn't matter whether Paul zigged or zagged, he was on his way to bear witness to the Romans. And it began here.

V. 27 Wouldn't you know it, Paul was almost done and Boom! Someone saw him. Remember, God waited until the last minute to free Peter. Now He waited until the last minute to have Paul spotted. It was God's design of this situation that Paul wasn't seen until the end of the week, meaning that any charges against him wouldn't be credible. He had worshiped like this for a week without a problem.

Vs. 28-36 In Texas they have "flash flooding." In Jerusalem they had "flash rioting."

V. 29 Because of the political power of the Jews, they were granted the right to kill anyone, including a Roman citizen, if that person profaned the temple. Trophimus never went in, but these Jews from Ephesus saw him and assumed the worst.

V. 31 The Romans had a garrison overlooking the temple grounds; and, like the fire department, they were always ready for a riot. They definitely earned their pay this day, saving Paul's life and actually having to carry him above their heads like he was a rock star. How ironic. The people were beating Paul, so they arrested and chained him. You wonder why Paul didn't begin to speak right away, but I assume having been beaten, he was still in shock. The Romans assumed he was just a radical Israelite or an Egyptian rebel. Paul wasn't just any radical. He was a Roman citizen.

As we watch Paul the disciple, we learn what it means to abide in Christ. Paul completely submitted himself into the Lord's hands with his focus set on fulfilling the mission Jesus had given him in the harvest. I'll bet it felt good when they stopped hitting and kicking him. But as we'll read in 2 Corinthians, Paul was used to suffering for His Lord in the harvest.

Psalm 150

Can you believe it? Today we are reading the last chapter in The Psalms. When was the last time you read all 150 psalms. Reward yourself with something special!

Just a thought here: If you wanted to use this for a devotional in a group, you can find some different "points" very easily. What follows the words *praise him*? You should get three groups. This is also a good Bible study.

V. 1 This is where to praise Him.

V. 2 This is why we should praise Him.

Vs. 3-5 This is how we should praise Him.

V. 6 To boil it all down and to complete The Psalms, everything should just *praise the Lord*.

Proverbs 18:9-10

There are lots of people who work hard and live on earth never knowing what's going on. I would understand these two verses together as "working for the Lord." Jesus said, *Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.* (Luke 11:23) There is no neutrality in this dark time of harvest. If we know what is happening in the world, we need to be in the harvest. To know and not to follow Christ in the harvest is what brings ruin. To live and

stand in the name of the Lord is what brings a life in line with reality, and though it might not be an easy life working in the harvest, it is still the safest place on earth as we follow Christ.