

Group Study Outline

2 Kings 18:1-19:37

There are considerably less questions this week as the story itself is long (= 74 verses instead of our normal 20-ish!), and the reading of it has its own power and impact.

Theme Sentence

The Lord delivers his people: trust in him (as Hezekiah did)!

Launching Question

In what situations do you ever feel that you're stupid to keep on as a Christian ... is it because of what people say, or because of circumstances you face, or ...?

READ 2 Kings 18:1-37

Questions

Hezekiah is like a shaft of bright sunlight: list all that makes him like David.
What picture emerges in 9-16 of what the political world map of the day is like?

In verses 17-25, how does the Rabshakeh attack Judah's trust?
In verses 26-37, how does the Rabshakeh undermine confidence in Hezekiah?
In verses 26-37, how does the Rabshakeh attack Judah's hope for deliverance?
What would it be like to have to listen to the Rabshakeh?
What is the 'sweetener' that he is offering to those 'on the wall' to make them think Assyria is a better bet than the Lord?

Thinking it through

In what ways have we ever experienced someone like a Rabshakeh?!
What is the effect of such niggling and mocking?

READ 2 Kings 19:1-37

Questions

Compare 19:1-4 with 19:14-19.
How do Hezekiah's different actions show the 'trust' of 18:5?
What can we learn from Hezekiah's prayer?

Compare 19:5-7 with 19:20-34
How does the prophet reassure Hezekiah?
What is the Lord's attitude to his own reputation?
How does the Lord show his commitment to his people?
What is the 'sign' of 29? why does he give that 'sign' to his people?

Compare 19:8-13 with 19:35-37
How does this story bring out that deliverance is extraordinary and unexpected?
How does this help us to appreciate the Lord's deliverance of us?

Thinking it through

How are the Lord's deliverance and the Lord's reputation connected ... for us?
Is it a lack of faith or a lack of patience that causes us not to wait upon the Lord for deliverance?

2 Kings 18:1-19:37



The bigger picture

The key to understanding 1 and 2 Kings is the two 'bookends'

- the promises made in 2 Samuel 7:4-17
- those promises fulfilled in Jesus, the King-for-ever.

As we read 2 Kings, we're looking at each king pondering if there's any way that he might be the fulfilment of the promises God has made ... and yet at the same time knowing that none of these kings could possibly be that King-for-ever.

After the tragedy of ch 17 (which is still very much the context for this story cf 18:9-12), a glimpse of the Davidic king. Here is one who uniquely trusted in the Lord (18:5). Could this be that King-for-ever? (We have to wait until 20:16-18 for an unequivocal 'No' to that question!)

So this is a moment to savour ... a godly king who does right: he 'called upon the Lord', and 'from his temple he heard my cry ... and thundered from the heavens' (cf Psalm 18:6, 13 etc). Feel the hopelessness of the situation in Jerusalem before enjoying the victory that the Lord wins for his remnant.

[NS]

Theme Sentence

The Lord delivers his people: trust in him (as Hezekiah did)!

Application

Our 'Biblical theology' approach to 2 Kings means that, when it comes to application, we're not really looking to the kings or prophets for examples to follow. There may be times when they do the right or wrong thing, but this is not being told to us so that we copy them, or not. As in every bit of the Bible, we want to ask: what is God doing? why is he doing it? how do we respond?

God is determined to keep his promises and preserve his people (albeit a 'surviving remnant' 19:30-31), to 'put his hook in the nose' (19:28) of those who oppose him, and to 'rebuke the words' of those who mock him (19:4).

- God specializes in delivering his people. Every rescue he accomplishes helps us to better understand our deliverance ... which is even more improbable, and from an even worse threat. How good is that!
- Don't listen when people (for whatever reason) entice us to distrust the Lord's deliverance. Has he promised it? however long the delay, he will do it.
- Those who arrogantly oppose the Lord will be humbled (cf Psalm 2).

Commentary

18:1-8 'David' reigns again

Hezekiah was uniquely 'right' (5). In 14:3, Amaziah did right 'yet not like David'. In 1 Kgs 15:11, Asa did right 'as David had done', yet he didn't remove the high places. Now, at long last, someone genuinely like David (3) comes long. In fact it is only ever said of David and Hezekiah that 'the Lord was with him' (7 cf 1 Sam 16:18; 18:12; 2 Sam 5:10) so that the king 'was successful' (7 cf 1 Sam 18:5, 14, 15) and 'struck down' the Philistines (8 cf 1 Sam 18:27; 19:8). Whereas Ahaz was the 'servant and son' of Assyria (16:7), Hezekiah 'rebelled' (7).

18:9-16 The historical context of a superpower-ful Assyria

18:9-12 summarise what the long chapter 17 has told in great detail: Israel has fallen (and the reason for this 'fall' is their disobedience to the Lord [12], rather than any superior might of Assyria). Meanwhile, back in Judah, notwithstanding the overall summary of his life as a rebellion against Assyria (18:7), at one particular moment, Hezekiah did submit as vassal state (14), and tried to buy off the oppressor using the familiar (and censured) 'stripping the assets' policy of his predecessors (cf 1 Kgs 14:25-26; 15:18-019; 2 Kgs 12:17-18; 16:8-9).

18:17-25 Assyria attacks Judah's trust

18:20 explains that Hezekiah subsequently reneged on his tribute-paying subservience, so Assyria 'sends the boys round'! The Rabshakeh's first speech is all about 'trust'. One by one, he demolishes anything they might trust in ...

20	words	but	they are a poor match for our military might
21	Egypt	but	it is weak (cf 24), and will stab you in the back (Isaiah 30-31 agrees that 'Egypt' was a useless policy)
22	the Lord	but	Hezekiah has got rid of the places to worship him but it was the Lord who sent me to destroy you!

18:26-37 Assyria attacks Judah's hope for deliverance

The Rabshakeh is goaded by the 'sssh!' of 26 to speak more loudly and publicly to those 'on the wall'. He seeks to undermine any confidence in their leader:

29	don't let Hezekiah deceive you;
30	don't let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord;
31	don't listen to Hezekiah;
32	don't listen to Hezekiah who misleads you.

Nine times, the Rabshakeh uses the word 'deliver' (in 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35, and especially as the theme in his conclusion [33-35]). In particular, he argues that no god has ever proved to be a match for the Assyrian King and been able to deliver its people, so nor can the Lord: 'he assumes that Yahweh is simply another generic deity of a miniscule kingdom who is no match for a world-class empire' (Dale Ralph Davis). The 'word' of 19:21f will answer this blasphemy.

Don't miss the alternatives of 'dung ... and urine' (25) or 'grain and wine ... etc' (31-32). The phrases in 31-32 are just like the kingdom's heyday under Solomon (1 Kings 4:25) for Assyria is offering a pseudo-covenant of blessing. No wonder this temptation stuns everyone into silence (36).

It's helpful to see the symmetry between the two halves of chapter 19:

19:1-4 The King's plea

At long last, a king in a crisis who does the right thing: Hezekiah turns to the Lord. The message he sends to the prophet (3) is a poignant lament: the crisis is dire, and we have no resources to face it. It also makes plain that the real issue is theological for they 'mock the living God' (4), just as Goliath did (1 Sam 17:10, 25, 26, 36, 45). Surely there should be some 'rebuke'?

19:5-7 The prophet's assurance

The Lord agrees that Assyria has 'reviled' the Lord, and simply predicts his comeuppance. And what reassurance from that double 'in his own land' (7)!

19:8-13 Assyria on the up

The reviling of the Lord deepens. Whereas 18:29, 32 claimed that Hezekiah might deceive; now it is the Lord himself who is said to mislead by his worthless promises. Historical precedence is grist to the propaganda wheel (11-13).

If we are wondering why this paragraph seems to just be a repeat of many of the taunts of ch 18, then think of the effect that this has for the story-telling: it feels like a dripping tap, gradually wearing down weary Jerusalem's resistance.

19:14-19 The King's prayer

The action of 14 is laying out 'the documentary blasphemy': 'Lord what will you do with what this says about you? & with him who was 'sent to mock you' (16)?'

'Enthroned above the cherubim' refers to the cherubim on the ark of the covenant (Exod 25:10-22) where God meets with his people ... so Hezekiah brings together the worldwide sovereignty of the Lord with his choice to be near his people. This is in stark contrast to all other gods (17-18) who 'were not gods', not really. So all of Assyria's bravado (11-13) is based on never having come across the reality of a God who actually is, who 'made' (15) rather than who 'is made' (18). Hezekiah's request is both for the deliverance that Assyria has mocked (cf 18:26-35) and for the Lord's reputation (19) ... 'twas ever thus that the Lord's salvation advertises the Lord's character (eg Exod 14:13-18).

19:20-34 The prophet's assurance

The 'sign' (29) is that, between now and the fulfilment of the promise of 28b, even whilst they are besieged, the Lord will continue to provide the food they need for year after year. The Lord's zeal (31) will achieve a Davidic king (Isaiah 9:7) and, here, a Davidic people; Sennacherib will not even enter the city, let alone destroy the people (32-34). So much for Assyria's arrogance (20-28).

19:35-37 Assyria struck down

An extraordinary conclusion: if we knew nothing of Hezekiah's Lord, we would call this some mystery illness. But the truth is that, just as in Exod 12:12, the Lord executes his judgement on all who stand against him, and thereby delivers his people. It takes another 20 years for v37 to happen, but 'happen' it does (cf 7)!