

Hezekiah's Prayer

Devotional Reading: Romans 8:29-39
Background Scripture: 2 Kings 19:1-34

2 Kings 19:14-20, 29-31

¹⁴ Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the LORD and spread it out before the LORD. ¹⁵ And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD: “LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. ¹⁶ Give ear, LORD, and hear; open your eyes, LORD, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to ridicule the living God.

¹⁷ “It is true, LORD, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands. ¹⁸ They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by human hands. ¹⁹ Now, LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone, LORD, are God.”

²⁰ Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent a message to Hezekiah: “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I have heard your prayer concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria.”

²⁹ “This will be the sign for you, Hezekiah:

“This year you will eat what grows by itself,
and the second year what springs from that.

But in the third year sow and reap,
plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

³⁰ Once more a remnant of the kingdom of Judah
will take root below and bear fruit above.

³¹ For out of Jerusalem will come a remnant,
and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors.

“The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.”

Key Text

LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone, LORD, are God. —2 Kings 19:19

Introduction

A. “Spare Tire” Prayer Life?

Have you ever heard of a “spare tire” prayer life? A person with such a prayer life uses prayer just as people use spare tires—only in emergencies.

The *how*, *when*, and *why* of a Christian’s prayers constitute a major indicator of his or her spiritual maturity. A spiritually healthy individual has a regular (daily) practice of prayer that draws heavily on Scripture. Such a prayer life begins by listening to God through his written Word. The spiritually mature Christian realizes that prayer is less about talking and more about listening to what God has already said. There’s no sense in seeking God’s approval on, say, an adulterous relationship since God has already said, “You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14; compare Matthew 5:27-30).

God will not answer certain types of prayers in a positive way—or even at all (examples: Psalm 18:41; James 4:3). We must ask according to his will (1 John 5:14-15). These facts apply to times of crisis as well—today’s lesson.

B. Lesson Context

The reign of godly King Hezekiah (716–687 BC) over the southern kingdom of Judah was a time of trouble. Previously, in 722 BC, the Assyrian Empire had annexed the northern kingdom of Israel along with areas to the north and east of it. In 702 BC, the Assyrian ruler Sennacherib invaded Judah, destroyed the major city of Lachish, and besieged Jerusalem itself (the two cities being about 30 miles apart). Jerusalem survived only after Hezekiah agreed to pay tribute to the Assyrian king (2 Kings 18:13–19:13; 2 Chronicles 32:1-19; Isaiah 36:1–37:13).

The account in today’s printed text also appears in Isaiah 37, almost word for word. This double placement reflects the close relationship between the king and the prophet, which appears in the story itself.

The text under consideration reports a conversation between Hezekiah and God, with the prophet Isaiah as the go-between. In 2 Kings 19:1-5, the king sent messengers to the prophet ask-

Worship in the Covenant Community

Unit 1: Leaders Set Worship Example

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Explain the historical circumstance behind Hezekiah’s prayer.
2. Distinguish Hezekiah’s response to God from the responses of other Old Testament kings.
3. Create a plan to respond to any crisis with immediate prayer to the Lord.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. “Spare Tire” Prayer Life?
- B. Lesson Context

I. Hezekiah’s Prayer (2 Kings 19:14-19)

- A. Preparation (v. 14)
- B. Adoration (v. 15)
- C. Supplication, Part 1 (v. 16)
- D. Agreement (vv. 17-18)
The Non-Gods of Kiev
- E. Supplication, Part 2 (v. 19)
Leave It on God’s Desk

II. God’s Response (2 Kings 19:20, 29-31)

- A. Prayer Heard (v. 20)
- B. Sign Promised (vv. 29-31)

Conclusion

- A. ACTS in Action
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

ing for his help communicating with God. Isaiah's answer promised that God would create a distraction to the Assyrians (19:6-7). The blasphemous and arrogant statements by the Assyrians did not help their cause (19:8-13)!

Texts that are parallel to those in today's lesson are Isaiah 37:14-20, 30-32, and 2 Chronicles 32:20. On the godly character of King Hezekiah, see 2 Kings 18:1-8.

I. Hezekiah's Prayer

(2 Kings 19:14-19)

A. Preparation (v. 14)

14a. Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it.

The contents of *the letter* that *Hezekiah received* are found in 2 Kings 19:10-13. The letter is only about 100 words long in English and 60 in Hebrew; its contents are threatening. The hostile sender was Sennacherib of Assyria. Being able to read and write was unusual at the time, although Israel's leaders apparently were all literate (Deuteronomy 17:18-19; compare and contrast 2 Samuel 15:14; 2 Kings 5:4-7; 10:2-7; Jeremiah 36:11-15).

14b. Then he went up to the temple of the LORD and spread it out before the LORD.

The temple of the Lord is the temple in Jerusalem. The point of departure for King Hezekiah regarding the task we see here was likely his nearby palace. The phrase *went up* when referring to travel to the temple was generally accurate, as the temple sat at a higher elevation than most other landmarks (compare Isaiah 37:14; Jeremiah 26:10).

How to Say It

Adonai (<i>Hebrew</i>)	Ad-owe-nye.
Amoz	Ay-mahz.
anthropomorphic cherubim	an-thruh-puh-more-fik.
Elohim (<i>Hebrew</i>)	El-o-heem.
Hezekiah	Hez-ih-kye-uh.
Sennacherib	Sen-nack-er-ib.
Shear-Jashub	She-are Jah-shub.
Yahweh (<i>Hebrew</i>)	Yah-weh.

The fact that Hezekiah *spread* the letter *before the Lord* implies that the king asked God to read it and respond in a way that reflected Israel's place as God's people of the covenant. While 2 Chronicles 23:6 confirms that only the priests were to enter the temple, it's hard to believe that the phrasing here means that Hezekiah stood outside that building. Emergency situations call for unusual measures (compare Luke 6:3-4)!

What Do You Think?

What prevents you from going to God in prayer when you receive disturbing communications?

Digging Deeper

What first step could you take to make this a habit?

B. Adoration (v. 15)

15a. And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD: "LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim,

Hezekiah's prayer invites us to reflect on God's names. At the most foundational level, you may find it surprising that God is known by three single-word names. When they are transliterated—that's where you swap letters of the Hebrew alphabet for similar-sounding letters in English—those three names are *Yahweh*, *Elohim*, and *Adonai*. But what about all those lists on the internet that claim "16 names of God," "God's 20 names," etc.? Most entries in such lists consist of one of the three names mentioned above combined with a descriptor (examples: "the living God" in Joshua 3:10; "a jealous God" in Deuteronomy 4:24; 5:9; 6:15). In the text at hand, the phrase *Lord . . . God* translates both the names *Yahweh* and *Elohim*. The longer phrase *Lord, the God of Israel* adds a descriptor; that exact phrase is not rare—it occurs in more than a hundred places in the Old Testament.

Another descriptor is added with God's dwelling between the cherubim (compare 1 Samuel 4:4). The creatures known by that designation are mentioned dozens of times in the Old Testament. The most familiar discussion of cherubim



Lord, show that
You are King!

Visual for Lesson 3. Discuss with learners what it might look like for the Lord to demonstrate his kingship in your community.

is in conjunction with the ark of the covenant and the place to meet with God (Exodus 25:17-22; 37:6-9). The word translated “enthroned” refers to a place where someone in authority sits, such as a throne or judgment seat (examples: Exodus 18:13-14; Deuteronomy 1:4; Judges 4:5; 1 Kings 1:46-48; 2:12, 19). The idea that God figuratively dwells in a place on earth is reflected in Exodus 15:17; 1 Kings 8:13; Psalms 132:13-14; 135:21; and Matthew 23:21. Affirming that this concept is not intended to be interpreted in a literal sense are 1 Kings 8:27, 30, 39, 43, 49; and Acts 17:24.

15b. “you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.

King Sennacherib of Assyria had claimed that other nations and their gods were powerless to stop his army (2 Kings 18:19-35). However, Hezekiah knew that the only true God was indeed *God over all the kingdoms of the earth*. This status necessarily derives from his role as Creator. The phrase *you have made heaven and earth* is reminiscent of Genesis 1:1. But Hezekiah was not quoting that passage. Rather, the text shows the idea that all things are part of the Lord’s creation and, therefore, all things are subject to the Lord. Creation implies ownership. That idea lay at the heart of Israel’s confession.

C. Supplication, Part 1 (v. 16)

16. “Give ear, LORD, and hear; open your

eyes, LORD, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to ridicule the living God.

The language here is anthropomorphic, which means attributing human characteristics (having *ear, eyes*, etc.) to God. He knows all things, of course (Psalms 139:2; 147:5; Hebrews 4:13; 1 John 3:20). Psalms of lament frequently ask God to hear the petitioner’s cry (examples: Psalms 4:1; 64:1) or to look at a situation (examples: 35:17, 22; 53:2). Sometimes he chooses to react positively on that awareness (Exodus 3:7), sometimes in a negative way (Jeremiah 7:16-20).

To ridicule the living God is to mock or taunt him. Sennacherib did this through his officer (2 Kings 18:35; 2 Chronicles 32:16-17; compare 1 Samuel 17). Could there be a greater blasphemy?

D. Agreement (vv. 17-18)

17-18. “It is true, LORD, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands. They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by human hands.

Sennacherib was at least partly right: *the Assyrian kings* had indeed *laid waste these nations and their lands* (2 Kings 17–18). Since the Assyrians had been able to do this, it logically follows that the *gods* of the conquered nations were powerless, therefore, fit only for *the fire* (compare Deuteronomy 4:28; Isaiah 44:9; Acts 17:29). The fact that an invader could destroy the idols proved their impotence. On this point, Hezekiah agrees with Sennacherib! But then the question was whether Sennacherib could defeat the Lord.

What Do You Think?

What are the modern “gods” of your society?

Digging Deeper

How does your church guard against being seduced by these gods?

The Non-Gods of Kiev

Have you ever heard of Perun? What about Dazhbog, Stribog, or Veles? Unless you have stud-

ied pre-Christian Ukrainian history, it's unlikely that you have. These were the main deities worshipped in Kievan Rus, the precursor state to both Ukraine and Russia, until AD 988. For millennia, such fictitious gods were believed to control the weather, agriculture, fertility, and wealth. But all those prayers and sacrifices fell on deaf ears and eyes of idols of wood, stone, and metal (compare Isaiah 44:9-20).

Things changed when Prince Vladimir I rose to the throne of Kiev. Wanting to unite his kingdom under a single religion, he attempted to convert his people to Orthodox Christianity. But old ways were hard to break. When the population resisted, he ordered that idols of the old gods be thrown into the river—and their die-hard supporters after them. Despite such a wrong-headed conversion method, Christianity eventually became deeply rooted in Ukraine. The gods of wood, stone, and metal were forgotten.

Everyone worships something. Those who think that statement to be untrue are worshipping themselves; they have placed themselves on the thrones of their own hearts. Today, we may not see many people bowing to idols of wood and stone, but that doesn't mean that the problem of idolatry is nonexistent. The main problem is idols of the heart (compare Ezekiel 14:1-11). Where are you most in danger of slipping into such idolatry?

—A. W.

E. Supplication, Part 2 (v. 19)

19. “Now, LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone, LORD, are God.”

Hezekiah closed his prayer with the desire that *God* would triumph over the invaders. Sennacherib had rightly claimed to be superior in his encounters with foreign powers. Nevertheless, the survival of Jerusalem would prove the superiority of Judah's God to all others.

Hezekiah wished all the nations to know about that superiority. This theme appears at many points in the Old Testament when Israel sought (or should have sought) to extol God before the Gentiles (1 Kings 8:41-43; 1 Chronicles 16:23-29; Isaiah 49:6). But Israel would not succeed in that

task unless the nation stopped profaning the name of the *Lord* in the sight of *the kingdoms of the earth* (Ezekiel 20:9, 14, 22; 36:20-23; 39:7).

What Do You Think?

Is God's glory diminished if he does not choose to deliver you from difficult situations? Explain your answer.

Digging Deeper

How can you give God glory in situations from which you have not experienced the relief of deliverance?

Leave It on God's Desk

Lena set to work with her usual diligence when her boss asked her to compile a report of recent sales data. As she looked at the figures, she began to realize the serious financial condition of the company. So she went beyond what her boss asked her to do and compiled a second report. It featured recommendations for fixing the problem.

As she placed both reports on her boss's desk, doubts entered Lena's mind. She had a nagging feeling her second report would anger her boss, resulting in it being ignored or—worse—misapplied. So she spent the next couple of weeks fretting and losing sleep.

Noticing this change in demeanor, Lena's boss correctly guessed the cause. So he called her in and said, “Thank you, Lena. I knew I could count on you to go above and beyond. And I know how much you care about the company and your coworkers. But keep in mind that once you put something on my desk, you must trust me to react appropriately. Your job is just to bring it to me.”

Lena's problem was that she had tried—perhaps subconsciously—to take the boss's responsibility onto herself, being unsure that he would do the right things. How often do we spread out our problems before God, but then don't quite believe that a right outcome will result? After we have done our part (compare Isaiah 6:8), let us, like Jesus, become comfortable praying, “Not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42).

—A. W.

II. God's Response

(2 Kings 19:20, 29-31)

A. Prayer Heard (v. 20)

20. Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent a message to Hezekiah: “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I have heard your prayer concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria.”

The material in the eight verses following this one gives God's full response to Hezekiah's request. The verse at hand is the preface to those eight; it notifies Hezekiah that God has *heard*. For God to “hear” also implies a willingness to “heed” (compare and contrast Matthew 13:13-15, quoting Isaiah 6:9-10).

What Do You Think?

How do you usually pray for leaders in your nation? allied countries? hostile regions?

Digging Deeper

What would change if you shifted the focus of your prayers regarding help for or judgment of these leaders?

B. Sign Promised (vv. 29-31)

29. “This will be the sign for you, Hezekiah: This year you will eat what grows by itself, and the second year what springs from that. But in the third year sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

This part of Hezekiah's prayer is the other bookend to 2 Kings 19:21-28. Those verses taunted the Assyrian king, throwing his boasts of conquest back in his face.

The eventual defeat of the Assyrian army would mean a return to normal agriculture over time. The Assyrians were adept at siege warfare (2 Kings 17:5), and this time-consuming tactic led to the destruction of vineyards, orchards, etc., as the invaders foraged and otherwise lived off the land during the siege. A liberated land therefore required time to restore agriculture.

The first two years depicted here echo Leviticus 25:5. These two years would require faith as survivors of the war scrambled for food. Faith

requires long-term thinking. Surely this points to God's profound care for the people of Jerusalem and Judah! Their nation would survive one of the most desperate moments in their long history, despite all earthly odds.

30. “Once more a remnant of the kingdom of Judah will take root below and bear fruit above.

By referring to a *remnant*, God's response acknowledged that not all Judeans would escape what was to come. Yet a kernel of the nation would survive and flourish (Zephaniah 2:6-7). The verse before us, therefore, moves from an earthly sense of the text just before it to one of projecting imagery that includes spiritual robustness (compare Isaiah 11). The prophet Isaiah even named his son Shear-Jashub, which means “a remnant will return” (Isaiah 7:3; compare 10:21-22). This concept is so important that it has given rise to a subfield of study today known as the “doctrine of the remnant.”

31a. “For out of Jerusalem will come a remnant,

Here we see an instance of parallelism that characterizes Hebrew poetry. The use of parallelism is evident in the repetition of similar ideas using different yet connected words. Thus “the house of Judah” from the previous verse parallels *Jerusalem* here. The identical English words *remnant* in these two verses hides the fact that the words are different in Hebrew—one being a verb, the other being a noun.

31b. “and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors.

The parallelism continues, with a *band of survivors* reflecting the previous two instances of “remnant.” *Mount Zion*, for its part, is parallel to the previous “kingdom of Judah” and “Jerusalem.”

31c. “The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.”

In addition to the parallel text of Isaiah 37:32, this phrase is reflected in Isaiah 9:7. The *Lord Almighty* designation is one of the combination name-and-descriptors discussed earlier. Interestingly, the word *zeal* is virtually synonymous with the word *jealousy*. We usually think of jealousy as a negative thing. But it can be positive when

the fervency (zeal) is appropriately motivated and informed. We see the positive side in John 2:17 (quoting Psalm 69:9) and the opposite in Philipians 3:6 (compare and contrast Zechariah 8:2).

Conclusion

A. ACTS in Action

This account reveals a faithful leader seeking God's help on behalf of an entire nation during a time of great crisis. This aspect of spiritual leadership remains relevant. Asking for God's help is still an important part of such leadership. The threat may come from many directions, but it often comes from those who aspire to control others involuntarily. The leader must be alert to such a danger and align the people's hopes with God's desires, as Hezekiah did.

One way to do this is via the ACTS method of prayer. This acronym speaks to a four-stage prayer pattern:

Adoration: Recognizing God for who he is;

Confession: Admitting one's sins;

Thanksgiving: Expressing gratitude for God's blessings already received;

Supplication: Requesting God's intervention or blessings.

This pattern, with various emphases, is seen in Hezekiah's prayer. Such prayers often come naturally to people who believe God can help them in crisis, assuming that God has no reason to dismiss such prayers (contrast Lamentations 3:8, 44; Ezekiel 8:18; 1 Peter 3:7). Indeed, in today's text, God answered promptly and positively.

But supplication in and of itself isn't the whole of the ACTS-pattern prayer battle; it's only one-fourth. A vital part of the ACTS prayer pattern is ensuring some balance among its four aspects. The prayer lives of many Christians lack such a balance. That deficiency is seen when we spend most of our prayer time asking for things (supplication), with little time spent in adoration, confession, and thanksgiving.

Consider Hezekiah's prayer again: he didn't start with his plea for help; he started with adoration. Then he moved to recognition of sin—Assyria's sin of blasphemy. We may think that

"confession" involves only one's personal sin, but the Bible witnesses to corporate confession as well (Leviticus 16:21; 26:40; Ezra 10:1; etc.).

Moving to the aspect of thanksgiving, this is difficult to detect in this singular prayer of Hezekiah. But thanking God was a big part of Israelite prayer practices (1 Chronicles 16:34, 41); a prayer of King David witnesses to all four ACTS elements (29:10). Returning to the aspect of supplication, another challenge in this area is to pray with right motives. Such motives align with God's stated will (Matthew 6:10; James 4:3, 15).

A further challenge is not to use prayer as a spare tire—"only in emergencies"! Today many Christians face crises of persecution, famine, political unrest, injustice, etc. It's important to pray for issues that affect the body (James 5:14-15), but this is where the "emergency, spare tire" practice seems to reveal itself the most.

A Christian once counted the prayers and their nature as he sat through 10 weeks of an adult Bible class. When the 10 weeks were up, he analyzed the resulting 133 prayers to see patterns. He discovered that every prayer could be categorized in one of three ways: prayers for bodily healing or preservation of life (97 prayer requests); prayers for "situations" such as grief, marriage, and job loss (33 requests); and prayers for spiritual issues (3 requests). Contrast that with what Jesus had to say about prayer in Matthew 6:5-15.

What Do You Think?

Can you identify disparities concerning the 10-week examination and your personal prayer experience?

Digging Deeper

What change could you make to be more in line with Jesus' teaching?

B. Prayer

Father, may we pray with right motives and right priorities! In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Pray with one desire: that God's will be done.