

# Abiding Fruit

*Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart*

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## **There Was None Like Him 2 Kings 18:5**

These words are spoken of King Hezekiah, King of Judah. He is described as one who *trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel, so that there was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor among those who were before him*. This was a man who was pre-eminent in those qualities that God loved. His reign is described as being 29 years (715 – 686 BC). This was an actual sole reign of 20 years and a co-regency with his son Manasseh for 9 years. In addition, Hezekiah was a co-regent with his father, Ahaz, so his experience in ruling was long. His father Ahaz was a very wicked man and king, and Hezekiah's son, Manasseh was truly one of the monsters (2 Kings 21:16) of biblical history (though there appears to have been genuine repentance on his part late in life – see 2 Chron. 33:10 – 20). The question of how a godly son and father appears between these 2 wicked men raises questions that we are simply unable to answer satisfactorily.

During Hezekiah's reign, he was fortunate to have two great prophets in the nation, namely; Isaiah and Micah (see 2 Kings 19:2; Isa. 1:1; 37:21; Mic. 1:1). One hundred years after the death of Hezekiah in 586 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar would be destroying the city of Jerusalem and the Temple. In the meantime, the Assyrians had a stranglehold on the world, though their power was declining. Hezekiah is to be noted for his spiritual activities. He was the first king of Judah to react correctly to the high places of worship that continued to be a snare to the people. He removed them completely, he destroyed the pillars and the Asherah (vs. 4), and amazingly, he broke in two the bronze serpent that Moses had made (Numb. 21:8, 9). The reason he did this was because it had become an idol. Snakes in the ancient world were regarded as symbols of fertility and the Canaanites promoted this. It would take immense courage for any person to destroy something that had been in existence within the congregation for hundreds of years and was connected with their history in the wilderness. Hezekiah appears to have been a decisive man.

He was opposed to idolatry and this always pleased God. The first two commandments of the Law of God state quite specifically that God alone is to be worshipped and adored and that there are to be no rivals (Exodus 20:1 – 6). Hezekiah understood that complete dependence on God would be his success. It is interesting when you read the accounts of his life that his material success was directly related to his spiritual success. This is a true biblical principle. God blesses us in all other realms when we honor Him first. So spiritual life is very important!

Hezekiah's encounter with Assyria, with Sennacherib and his general, the Rabshakeh (see 2 Kings 18:17 – 19:34) is truly what established him as a great king. It was a time of great political consequence. It was time of great civil crisis, and under girding all of these issues was the great conflict that Satan was bringing against the people of God. It was Hezekiah who led the way in standing firm and resolute for God. We often refer to the "*public square*" meaning that place where culture, politics, economics and religion all interact. This was Hezekiah's "*public square*" conflict.

It is apparent in this time of civil strife and crisis that Hezekiah's success was in his reliance on God (18:7). Hezekiah knew the danger that the Assyrians posed. He had seen the northern kingdom (Israel and Samaria) defeated and taken into exile (compare 2 Kings 18:7b – 12), at the hand of Shalmaneser. In the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reign, the great Assyrian, Sennacherib came against Judah with great force. Hezekiah submitted to Sennacherib and paid a tribute in the hope that Sennacherib would leave him alone.

Sennacherib sent against Hezekiah that triumvirate of generals and leaders (the Tartan, the Rab-saris and the Rabshakeh) along with his great army (see 18:17). In a seemingly strategic move, Hezekiah sent his own representatives; Eliakim, who oversaw his household, Shebna the Secretary, and Joah the Recorder (see 18:18). I can see humor in this situation, for opposed to them are the great Assyrians who were very violent and wicked men. Hezekiah sends the *gentle* men of Judah to negotiate for him. The Rabshakeh's challenge is against God. Hezekiah is taunted to not rely on Pharaoh of Egypt as an ally, nor to even think of relying on God since Assyria was the servant of God to bring judgment upon Judah. The Rabshakeh seemed familiar with God's retributive judgment upon His disobedient people and he stresses this fact. This argument was intended to destroy all resistance by melting the heart of Hezekiah and especially the people. Sometimes, during moments of great national crisis, the people take the power into their own hands believing that the policies of their leaders are going to destroy them. In reality, this is precisely what the enemy desires, so that they can easily attain victory and then destroy those who think that they can and have staved off defeat. We are familiar with these policies in our own time.

Hezekiah's response to the Rabshakeh's taunt was to say nothing (see 18:36). The Rabshakeh's strategy was brilliant. Taunt the king in the presence of all his people and sew the seeds of dissent among them. This explains why Hezekiah's representatives desire the Rabshakeh to speak to them in Aramaic and not in Hebrew so that the people would not be able to listen in and thus become despondent. I always come away from reading this passage of Scripture admiring the military tactics and genius of the Rabshakeh, though he was a wicked man. He certainly understood his enemy. On the other hand, the fact that Hezekiah prevailed in that the people were silent response to the Rabshakeh speaks highly of this king (see 18:36). In private, Eliakim, Shebna and Joah come to Hezekiah in a state of mourning (18:37).

The first response of Hezekiah is to tear his own clothes and cover himself in sackcloth and then to enter into the house of the Lord. This is the attitude of repentance. The first response to evil that comes to us should be to consider our spiritual condition and relationship before God. This is what Hezekiah did (19:1). We know that Hezekiah was a man of prayer, because later on when he lay dying, and he heard the words of Isaiah telling of his death, it was in bitterness of soul that he turned his face to the wall and prayed to God (2 Kings 20:1 -11; Isa. 38:1 – 22). Isaiah 38 records the poem that Hezekiah wrote in response to God's healing.

Hezekiah's prayer in 2 Kings 19:14 – 19 (also Isa. 37:14 – 20) is the key as to why this king was like none other before or after him. He sought Isaiah the prophet to hear what God thought on the situation (19:2 – 7; see esp. Isa. 37:1 – 7). His prayer is a prayer of worship. He magnifies God and then contrasts the threat of Sennacherib with the true glory and greatness of God. He pits the idols of Assyria against the true and living God of Israel. He acknowledges that as far as man was concerned there was no hope against the Assyrians, so his hope was in God alone. He pleads that God would save them and thus reveal to all the nations of the world that God was the only true God.

God always hears the desperate cries of his people. True response to God in the midst of our desperate conditions and situations is to magnify and glorify God. To complain to God is not the proper response, but how often we criticize God for His actions or seemingly lack thereof.

God desires that we trust Him and submit to Him in those very trials that offer no human solution. I believe that it is this kind of faith and trust in God that God honors, and delights to reward. It is childlike reliance in God against all hope that God uses to accomplish His ends. The impossible situations of life are not impossible to God. Hezekiah's prayer caused Sennacherib to abandon Judah since God came among them and destroyed 185,000 Assyrians in a single night. Sennacherib went home to Assyria and was killed by two of his sons, and thus ends the saga against Hezekiah (19:32 – 37). God prevails when we trust Him. Let us emulate this man of whom it was said, *"there was none like him."*