

## Who was Hezekiah in the Bible?

Hezekiah was one of the few kings of Judah who was constantly aware of God's acts in the past and His involvement in the events of every day. The Bible describes Hezekiah as a king who had a close relationship with God, one who did "what was good and right and faithful before the LORD his God" (2 Chronicles 31:20).

Hezekiah's story is told in 2 Kings 16:20–20:21; 2 Chronicles 28:27–32:33; and Isaiah 36:1–39:8. He is also mentioned in Proverbs 25:1; Isaiah 1:1; Jeremiah 15:4; 26:18–19; Hosea 1:1; and Micah 1:1.

Hezekiah, a son of the wicked King Ahaz, reigned over the southern kingdom of Judah for twenty-nine years, from c. 715 to 686 BC. He began his reign at age 25 (2 Kings 18:2). He was more zealous for the Lord than any of his predecessors (2 Kings 18:5). During his reign, the prophets Isaiah and Micah ministered in Judah.

After Ahaz's wicked reign, there was much work to do, and Hezekiah boldly cleaned house. Pagan altars, idols, and temples were destroyed. The bronze serpent that Moses had made in the desert (Numbers 21:9) was also destroyed, because the people had made it an idol (2 Kings 18:4). The temple in Jerusalem, whose doors had been nailed shut by Hezekiah's own father, was cleaned out and reopened. The Levitical priesthood was reinstated (2 Chronicles 29:5), and the Passover was reinstated as a national holiday (2 Chronicles 30:1). Under Hezekiah's reforms, revival came to Judah.

Because King Hezekiah put God first in everything he did, God prospered him. Hezekiah "held fast to the Lord and did not stop following him; he kept the commands the Lord had given Moses. And the Lord was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook" (2

Kings 18:6-7).

In 701 BC, Hezekiah and all of Judah faced a crisis. The Assyrians, the dominant world power at the time, invaded Judah and marched against Jerusalem. The Assyrians had already conquered the northern kingdom of Israel and many other nations, and now they threatened Judah (2 Kings 18:13). In their threats against the city of Jerusalem, the Assyrians openly defied the God of Judah, likening Him to the powerless gods of the nations they had conquered (2 Kings 18:28-35; 19:10-12).

Faced with the Assyrian threat, Hezekiah sent word to the prophet Isaiah (2 Kings 19:2). The Lord, through Isaiah, reassured the king that Assyria would never enter Jerusalem. Rather, the invaders would be sent home, and the city of Jerusalem would be spared (2 Kings 19:32-34). In the temple, Hezekiah prays a beautiful prayer for help, asking God to vindicate Himself: "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" (2 Kings 19:19).

God, faithful as always, kept His promise to protect Jerusalem. "That night the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies!" (2 Kings 19:35). The remaining Assyrians quickly broke camp and withdrew in abject defeat. "So the Lord saved Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem. . . . He took care of them on every side" (2 Chronicles 32:22).

Later, Hezekiah became very sick. Isaiah told him to set things in order and prepare to die (2 Kings 20:1). But Hezekiah prayed, beseeching God to be merciful and to remember all the good he had done. Before Isaiah had even left the king's house, God told Isaiah

to tell Hezekiah that his prayer had been heard and that his life would be extended fifteen years. Isaiah applied a poultice, and Hezekiah was healed (2 Kings 20:5-7).

However, soon after his healing, Hezekiah made a serious mistake. The Babylonians sent a gift to Hezekiah, for they had heard Hezekiah had been sick. In foolish pride, Hezekiah showed the Babylonians all of his treasures, all the silver and gold, and everything in his arsenal. There was nothing Hezekiah did not parade in front of them. Isaiah rebuked Hezekiah for this act and prophesied that all the king had shown the Babylonians would one day be taken to Babylon—along with Hezekiah's own descendants.

During the years following his illness, Hezekiah fathered the heir to Judah's throne, Manasseh, who would turn out to be the evilest king ever to reign in Judah (2 Kings 18-20; 2 Chronicles 29-32; Isaiah 36-39). Tradition has it that Manasseh is the one who murdered Hezekiah's friend, Isaiah.

Hezekiah's life is, for the most part, a model of faithfulness and trust in the Lord. His faith was more than superficial, as his bold reforms show. Hezekiah's trust in the Lord was rewarded with answered prayer, successful endeavors, and miraculous victory over his enemies. When faced with an impossible situation, surrounded by the dreadful and determined Assyrian army, Hezekiah did exactly the right thing—he prayed. And God answered.