

I will praise the LORD with my whole heart

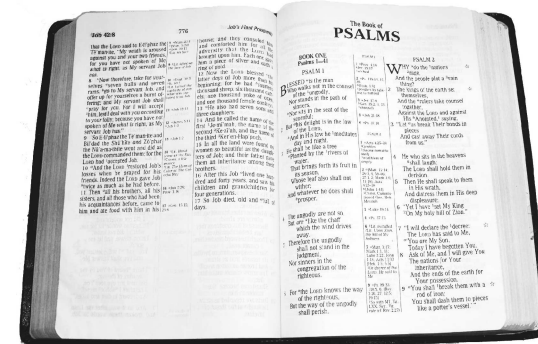
This psalm tells us how we should worship God:

- *I will praise the LORD with my whole heart* (1; cp. Psalm 103:1). Whole-hearted worship can only come from someone who is walking with the Lord and seeking to lead a holy life. It must not be confused with having an ‘emotional high’ induced through hand-clapping and repeated chorus-singing.
- We must worship him with understanding. The works of God are described as being great, wonderful and powerful (2,4,6). We should study them and think much about them. Such an exercise gives the godly person great pleasure and stimulates praise (2).
- We must be reverent in our worship. God’s name, that is his character, is *holy and awesome* (9). True worship expresses a sense of awe and adoration. If we are flippant or thoughtless in our worship, we should question whether we really know the living God. A.W. Tozer quotes the line of a hymn, ‘In our astonished reverence we confess thine uncreated loveliness.’ He aptly remarks that ‘the God of the modern evangelical rarely astonishes anybody’ (WORSHIP – THE MISSING JEWEL OF THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH, page 26).

Verse 3 speaks of God’s work in the singular: *His work is honourable and glorious*. This particular work is that of sending redemption to his people (9). We are reminded of God’s glorious character which is revealed in his works for his covenant people. He was righteous, gracious and full of compassion, faithful and kind to Israel of old and continues to be so to every Christian today (3–6). Truth and justice shine through all his works and his precepts (the things that he has decreed) stand fast for ever and ever. No one can overthrow God’s wise and glorious decrees (7–8). *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom* (10; cp. Proverbs 1:7; 9:10). An unbeliever may possess a brilliant intellect but he shows himself to be a fool when he despises the Word of God. If you fear God it will be reflected in your attitude to worship. **Are you wholehearted and reverent when you come to worship God?**

PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God’s holy Word simply explained and applied



August 2017

2 Kings chapters 12 to 25
Psalms 108 to 111

For they dealt faithfully

The temple of the Lord would have had a special place in the affection of Jehoash. It was there that he had been hidden from the wicked Athaliah who had desecrated and neglected it. The king later set his heart on repairing the temple but the priests were slow in getting the work going. Jehoash rebuked them for their tardiness and the work began after the people had given generously and joyfully (4–14; cp. 2 Chronicles 24:4–11).

Money has an uncanny power to corrupt the best of people but things were different in Judah at this time. The workmen were entrusted with large sums of money and were not required to account for their spending on wages, materials, etc., *for they dealt faithfully* (15). Are you faithful in the stewardship of your money, or do you rob God in neglecting to pay your tithes and offerings (Malachi 3:8–10). Is the love of money (*'a root of all kinds of evil'*; 1 Timothy 6:10) spoiling your Christian life?

Jehoiada lived to the age of one hundred and thirty. He exerted a godly influence upon Jehoash to his very end. He was also a restraining influence on the ungodly leaders of Judah. After his death, these leaders came to the king who listened to their demands. Idol worship was soon flourishing and God's prophets were despised. Jehoash proved to be treacherous, ordering the assassination of Zechariah, the priest's godly son (see 2 Chronicles 24:15–26 for details).

The Lord punished the ungrateful king by bringing the Syrians against him and giving them victory over the more numerous army of Judah. He reaped the evil that he had sown when he himself was assassinated by his servants (17–21). **No one can despise God nor harm his servants and escape unpunished!**

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You are a priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek

This psalm is quoted more than any other in the New Testament. It speaks directly of Christ, setting him forth as our great King and Priest. We have a glimpse of the communion between the Father and the Son in verse 1: *The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool.'* The Lord Jesus quoted this verse to confound and to silence the Pharisees. They acknowledged that the Messiah was David's Son by descent and that he would sit on the throne of David but they refused to believe that he was also David's God. How could David by inspiration of the Holy Spirit call the Messiah his Lord if he were no more than his descendent? (Matthew 22:41–46).

The risen Lord Jesus ascended to heaven where he is exalted to the right hand of God the Father (Acts 2:33–35; Hebrews 1:3). The gospel-age is the day of his power and he is calling out a great army of followers who are clothed with the beauty of holiness and have the freshness of the dew of youth (3). Biblical holiness is not dull and joyless; it is fresh and beautiful!

Verse 4 is very important! God the Father has made an oath to the Son, *'You are a priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek.'* The Messiah is from the tribe of Judah and could not therefore be a Levitical priest. He is a priest of a far greater order, that of Melchizedek (4; cp. Hebrews 5:6–10; 7:17,21). Melchizedek, whose name means 'king of righteousness' was also king of Salem, meaning 'king of peace' (Genesis 14:18; Hebrews 7:2). He was also a priest of the most high God. His origin and end are unknown and in this respect he was a 'type' of the Son of God who had no beginning and who will have no end (Genesis 14:18; Hebrews 7:1–3). **The Lord Jesus has an unchangeable priesthood and he ever lives to make intercession for us. His great, all sufficient sacrifice is never to be repeated (Hebrews 7:24–27).** Let us worship our great King and Priest and rejoice in him!

Let them curse, but you bless

Notice how David describes himself as he prays for mercy:

- *I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me* (22). Unkind words and deed had hurt and wounded him. Let us be sure that we do not wound others with a sharp tongue or with unchristian behaviour.
- He felt that he was declining like an evening shadow and was shaken about as a locust is tossed by the wind (23).
- He was physically weak through fasting (24). This may have been religious fasting or a loss of appetite because of his distress.
- He was subjected to scorn and reproach by his enemies (25).

When our knees are weak we can still cry out to God who is strong and almighty. He will never fail us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5–6). His mercy is good and we know that he will deliver us, help us and save us (21, 26). We should not fear when the wicked curse us. What are their curses when God blesses us? *Let them curse, but you bless* (28). The wicked man has Satan (Hebrew word translated ‘*accuser*’ in NKJV; cp. AV translation) *at his right hand* (6) but we know that *God shall stand at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those who condemn him* (31). The *right hand* speaks of spiritual nearness. The Lord is with us in the deepest and darkest valleys.

David closes with an expression of confidence that God will bring him through so that he *will greatly praise the LORD* (30). **When did you last greatly praise the LORD?**

*Help, Lord! May all my foes perceive,
I have a heavenly strength and stay;
With thee to bless me and relieve,
I can endure the hardest way.*

(Henry Francis Lyte)

Jehoahaz pleaded with the LORD, and the LORD listened to him

This chapter turns our attention from the kingdom of Judah to events in the northern kingdom (Israel). The proverb, ‘Like father, like son’ is illustrated in the lives of many of the kings of Israel and Judah. Jehu had set a bad example to his son Jehoahaz and that example was followed (1–2; cp. 10:31). He *followed the sins of Jeroboam* who had made calves of gold for the Israelites to worship (1 Kings 12:25–33). Idolatry breaks the first three of the ten commandments and is an insult to the Lord Almighty who created the heavens and the earth.

Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel (3). Do you realise that God is angry with sinners and that he will certainly punish us if we do not repent and turn from our sins? (see Romans 1:18; John 3:19,36). The Lord punished Israel for their sin as he did with Judah by giving the Syrians victory over them. *So Jehoahaz pleaded with the LORD, and the LORD listened to him* (4). The idols that he worshipped were powerless to save him from the oppression of the Syrians. Jehoahaz would have known of the reality of the Lord, remembering God’s dealings with his father. There was also the continuing ministry of Elisha to his nation.

God was most gracious to pay attention to the prayer of Jehoahaz and he raised up a deliverer so that Israel was freed from Syrian oppression (5). The Israelites showed little gratitude to God however, and they continued to worship idols (6). Jehoahaz was a wicked man but God heard his prayer. Some people believe that they have been too wicked to find mercy from God but Jesus promised, ‘*He who comes to me I will by no means cast out*’ (John 6:37). If you are not a Christian, do you realise that God sent his Son into the world to die for sinners like you? If you come to the Lord Jesus sincerely repenting of your sin and seeking forgiveness, you will be forgiven and you will have peace with God. You will be delivered from the power of Satan and sin. **If you are a Christian, how do you show your gratitude to God for all that he has done for you?**

The man of God was angry with him

Most of us are familiar with great incidents in the life of Elisha whose ministry was marked by some outstanding miracles. A lesser known incident is recorded of the dying prophet. He had exercised a godly ministry for about sixty years and he was terminally ill (14). Joash (also called Jehoash) king of Israel was a wicked man but he respected Elisha. He visited the dying prophet and wept and lamented. He uttered similar words to those used by Elisha when Elijah was taken: ‘*O my father, my father, the chariots of Israel and their horsemen*’ (14; cp. 2:12). Israel’s strength lay not in its army but in the prophet who had the army of the living God with him.

Though Joash was an evil man (11), the Lord was very gracious to him in giving him a promise from the lips of the dying prophet. * Elisha told the king to take a bow and to open an east-facing window. He put his hands over the hands of Joash and told him to shoot an arrow through the window. The arrow was a symbol of deliverance from Syria and the king was told to strike the Syrians at Aphek until they were destroyed (Aphek was the place where Israel had once enjoyed a great victory over the Syrians; 1 Kings 20:29–30). Elisha then told Joash to take the other arrows and to ‘*strike the ground*’. The king shot only three of the arrows before stopping, *and the man of God was angry with him*. Elisha told Joash that he would only strike Syria three times but if he had struck the ground five or six times, he would have struck Syria until it was destroyed (15–19).

Joash had been given a great promise from the Lord but his actions show that he was half-hearted in claiming it. *Without faith it is impossible to please him* (Hebrews 11:6). We have wonderful promises from God but we too are often unbelieving and we lack enthusiasm. **If we do not pray with faith, trusting in the Lord, how can we expect to see God answer our prayers (cp. James 1:6–7)?**

* God’s goodness did not lead Joash to repentance, however (cp. Romans 2:4).

But I give myself to prayer

David uttered this psalm at a time when he was suffering persecution at the hand of the wicked. They had lied and slandered him with words of hatred though he had done nothing to deserve such terrible treatment. They rewarded him evil for good and hatred for his love (2–5). What did David do (and what should we do) in such desperate circumstances? He said, ‘*But I give myself to prayer*’ (4).

Verses 6 to 20 are among the most difficult in Scripture to understand. Spurgeon comments, ‘We confess that as we read some of these verses we have need of all our faith and reverence to accept them as the voice of inspiration; but the exercise is good for the soul, for it educates our sense of ignorance, and tests our teachableness. Yes, Divine Spirit, we can and do believe that even these dread words from which we shrink have a meaning consistent with the attributes of the Judge of all the earth, though his name is LOVE. How this may be we shall know hereafter.’ (THE TREASURY OF DAVID).

How can a godly man express sentiments which breathe such a vehement desire for revenge (14–20)? He was praying that his wicked enemies would reap the terrible things that they were sowing. The wicked enemy should not receive mercy because he was merciless, *as he loved cursing, so let it come to him; as he did not delight in blessing, so let it be far from him* (16–17). When we feel as David felt, we must never seek personal revenge but commit our cause to God and repay evil with good (cp. Romans 12:19–21). When David had the opportunity to take revenge he refused to do so (1 Samuel chapters 24 and 26; 2 Samuel 16:9–10; 19:18–23).

When we face opposition and persecution, let us give ourselves to prayer. Let us also encourage ourselves in the Word of God. We know that God is for us, whoever may be against us (Romans 8:31).

O God, my heart is steadfast

David wrote the first five verses of this psalm (which are also found in Psalm 57:7–11) when he fled from Saul (see the heading of Psalm 57; cp. 1 Samuel 24). Verses six to thirteen are identical to Psalm 60:5–12 which was written after God had given him victory over the Edomites (cp. 2 Samuel 8:12–14). Matthew Henry writes, ‘This psalm begins with praise and concludes with prayer, and faith is at work in both.’

David had great confidence in God to whom he was able to say, ‘*O God, my heart is steadfast*’ (1). His faith was not shaken by danger nor by difficult and trying circumstances. He praised God and rejoiced in his mercy and truth (2–4). When the stronghold of Edom appeared to be impossible to take, he called on the Lord, ‘*Give us help in trouble for vain is the help of man*’ (10–12). Men are limited in their power and ability, but with God all things are possible (Luke 18:27). *We will do valiantly* through God if we trust in him (13). Are you discouraged and weary in the battles of the Christian life? Rely on God and take heart! Through him you will do valiantly. When God fights for us, no obstacle can stand in our way (cp. Romans 8:31,37). You know that God will never leave you nor forsake you and you can boldly say, ‘*The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?*’ (Hebrews 13:5–6).

Spurgeon writes, ‘We ought to pray with all the more confidence in God when our confidence in man is altogether gone. When the help of man is vain, we shall not find it vain to seek the help of God.’ (THE TREASURY OF DAVID). **Is your heart steadfast in trial? Are you standing firm against all the pressures from this godless world?** We can have a heart that is steadfast when we are in danger, if we will trust in our great God who cannot fail. Let us praise and magnify his great name! *Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; and your glory above all the earth* (5).

They put the man in the tomb of Elisha

Israel and Judah were often raided by marauders from neighbouring countries. These raiders would loot and kill, causing fear and havoc among the people, but it was the Lord who sent them to punish his wayward people (24:2). Some Israelites were about to bury a man when they saw a band of raiders from Moab. They were obliged to move quickly and unable to use the tomb intended, they hastily opened up a nearby tomb in which Elisha was buried. *And they put the man in the tomb of Elisha*. As soon as the man’s body touched the bones of Elisha, he was raised from the dead and stood on his feet (20–21). This miracle does not sanction the superstitious veneration of relics practised in the Roman Catholic Church. They use relics in the hope of obtaining miracles whereas this miracle was unsought and unexpected.

Some godly men and women exert an influence long after they have departed this life to be with the Lord. The influence of Elisha was still strong in a society that had generally forsaken God. The same could be said of him as the Lord said of Abel: *He being dead still speaks* (Hebrews 11:4). If we are not an influence for good while we live, we can hardly expect to leave a legacy of godliness when we die. **What kind of impact is your life having on those around you?** Parents, are you providing a godly example to your children which will bear spiritual fruit long after you die?

The Israelites deserved the oppression they suffered at the hands of the Syrians but God was gracious and had compassion on them because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (23; cp. Genesis 17:2–7). Israel had forsaken God and broken his covenant, but he delayed casting them off because he delights in mercy (Micah 7:18). It is encouraging to know that even in the darkest of times, the Lord has a faithful remnant who love and serve him. This was true in the history of Israel and Judah and it is still true today. **Be encouraged to persevere in shining as a light in the surrounding darkness.** Joash defeated the Syrians three times just as the Lord had promised (19, 25).

But Amaziah would not heed

Amaziah was another king of Judah who began well, doing *what was right in the sight of the LORD* (3) but failed to finish well. Like his father he lapsed into idolatry and was later assassinated (19). More details of his reign are found in 2 Chronicles chapter 25. Amaziah had those who murdered his father executed but he obeyed God's law in sparing their sons (6). God gave him a great victory over the Edomites (7) but things then began to go wrong. He captured the Edomite gods and worshipped them incurring the anger of the Lord, but he would not listen to the prophet sent by God (2 Chronicles 25:14–16).

Amaziah challenged Jehoash (Joash) king of Israel to face him in battle. Jehoash warned him by a parable not to be so foolish and rightly observed that his success over Edom had gone to his head and had made him proud. He advised him to stay at home and not to meddle with trouble, *but Amaziah would not heed* (8–11). He had refused to listen to a prophet sent by God (see previous paragraph) and he was deaf to the admonition of the king of Israel. Judah was defeated and plundered because its king was not given to acting on sound advice (12–14). *Amaziah turned away from following the LORD* (2 Chronicles 25:27) and he paid for his folly. He could no longer count on God's protection and he was assassinated by conspirators (19).

Some Christians resent anyone who kindly seeks to warn them against taking a course of action that would lead them into sin. Others refuse to deal with pride that lurks within them and are offended if anyone dare point out that they are failing to obey the Word of God. **Do you welcome and heed advice and admonition from your pastor or godly Christian friends? They have your best interests at heart and you should be grateful for their concern.**

So Jehoiachin changed from his prison garments

The last chapter of 2 Kings is almost identical to the final chapter of the Book of Jeremiah. The prophet had told the king to surrender to the Babylonians for the sake of his family and Jerusalem, but he would not listen (Jeremiah 38:14–23). The siege of Jerusalem lasted eighteen months before the city fell to the Babylonians (1–4). Zedekiah and his soldiers escaped under cover of darkness but were eventually captured in the plain of Jericho. They were taken to Riblah where Zedekiah saw his sons and nobles executed. The Babylonians then put out his eyes and took him to their country in chains (1–7). Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed and the population of Judah was taken into exile except for some of the poor of the land whom the Babylonian army commander left behind as vine-dressers and farmers (8–12).

Gedaliah was appointed as governor over those remaining in Judah but was assassinated. Fearing reprisals from Babylon, all the people fled to Egypt (22–26). 2 Kings does end with a note of hope, however. Jehoiachin, a wicked young man who had been imprisoned in Babylon after reigning only three months (24:8–12) was restored to favour in the thirty-seventh year of his imprisonment. *So Jehoiachin changed from his prison garments* and went from prison to palace (29–30). Why was the Lord gracious to Jehoiachin? We do not know, but it is possible that after this he came to faith and obedience to God just as wicked Manasseh did in a Babylonian prison (2 Chronicles 33:10–13). God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform!

We do know that Jehoiachin's grandson was godly Zerubbabel (Ezra 3:2; cp. Matthew 1:12). Zerubbabel led the people back to Judah after the captivity and directed the rebuilding of the temple (his story is found in the Book of Ezra). He was an important instrument in the purposes of God. How encouraging! **God often sees fit to choose men and women from the most wicked homes to be used in his service. Let us give thanks to the Lord who is absolutely sovereign, infinitely wise, and full of grace!**

He finally cast them out from his presence

Jehoiakim was a wicked man who refused to listen to Jeremiah's warnings of judgment (Jeremiah 36). By this time Babylon was increasing in power and Judah paid tribute to Nebuchadnezzar for three years. The calamity that befell Judah was not an accident! The Word of God is quite explicit in stating that the Lord sent raiding bands from neighbouring states, fulfilling his Word spoken through the prophets (2–3). In the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim (605 BC) many young Jews of royal or noble descent were taken captive into Babylon. Daniel and his three friends were among these captives (Daniel1:1–7).

After the death of Jehoiakim, his son Jehoiachin reigned for just three months. He surrendered to the Babylonians who were besieging Jerusalem and was taken captive to Babylon with the soldiers and best craftsmen of Judah (8–16). Ezekiel was among these captives (Ezekiel 1:1–3). This captivity in 597 BC was the precursor of the captivity of Judah that was to follow eleven years later.

The king of Babylon appointed Jehoiachin's uncle, Mattaniah, to rule Judah, and changed his name to Zedekiah. His reign, which lasted eleven years, came to an end when he rebelled against the king of Babylon. There is a grim statement in verse 20 concerning this captivity: *For because of the anger of the LORD this happened in Jerusalem and Judah, that he finally cast them out from his presence.* Jerusalem was the Holy City where the people met with God. To be removed from Jerusalem and taken to Babylon was like being cast from God's holy presence (cp. Psalms 48, 137).

On the day of judgment all who do not know the Lord will be cast from his presence for ever and ever (Matthew 25:41,46; 2 Thessalonians 1:9). That will be far worse than the captivity in Babylon! Is your heart right with God? **If you reject Christ now, he will reject you on the day of judgment!**

The LORD saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter

The forty-one year reign of Jeroboam II was the longest of any of the kings of Israel. He was like his predecessors: *He did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who had made Israel to sin (23–24).* The sins of Jeroboam centred around the worship of the golden calves at Bethel and Dan (10:29). This long reign began at a time when there was much suffering. *For the LORD saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter; and whether bond or free, there was no helper for Israel (26).* This affliction probably refers to attacks from Israel's neighbours and the misery that followed. The effects of such attacks are vividly shown in the misery suffered by the Israelites in the time of Gideon (Judges 6:1–6).

The prophetic activities of Hosea, Amos and Jonah in the northern kingdom during this period were an evidence of the grace of God to a wicked nation. The prophecy of Hosea vividly shows the greatness of God's love for an unfaithful people.

There is no evidence that Jeroboam II sought the help of God in prayer but the Lord's goodness is seen in the way he enabled Jeroboam to win back lost territory as Jonah had prophesied (25). Hamath was in the far north of Israel and the Sea of Arabah is the Dead Sea (cp. Joshua 3:16; 12:3). These victories would have removed the suffering caused by the raiders. How good is our God! **Christian, if you are passing through a time of affliction or trouble, be encouraged. If the Lord had mercy on a nation that had turned its back on him, do you think that he will treat you less kindly?** Not at all! The Lord sees you in your trouble and he will be with you and bring you through. He *will never leave you nor forsake you* (Hebrews 13:5).

God is long-suffering but Israel failed to repent and thirty years after Jeroboam's death the nation was carried off into captivity by the Assyrians in 722 BC.

Then the LORD struck the king so that he was a leper

Azariah (also called Uzziah – verses 13, 32, 34; 2 Chronicles 26; Isaiah 6:1) enjoyed a long and prosperous reign over Judah of fifty-two years. Though his father Amaziah had turned away from the Lord to worship idols (2 Chronicles 25:14), young Azariah was faithful to God.

Like his father Amaziah, Azariah fell into the sin of pride. *When he was strong his heart was lifted up, to his destruction* (2 Chronicles 26:16). The reason for this judgment upon the king is found in 2 Chronicles 26 where there is a more detailed description of his reign. He usurped the sacred office of the priesthood by seeking to burn incense in the temple. The brave priests confronted him and told him to get out of the sanctuary, but as he raged at them, leprosy broke out on his forehead. *Then the LORD struck the king so that he was a leper* (5). To be struck with leprosy in such a manner was a sign of divine judgment (cp. Miriam, Numbers 12:10; Gehazi, 2 Kings 5:27). The king was a leper until the day of his death, never allowed again into the temple and his son Jotham ruled as co-regent (2 Chronicles 26:16–21).

We too must beware of pride! Pride may be seen in a number of ways. We may boast of our spiritual achievements but where would we be without the help of God? We may despise other believers who are not as well taught as ourselves, or we may look down on those who are ignorant of God and lost. We must beware of hypocrisy and walk humbly before God. *He who glories, let him glory in the LORD* (1 Corinthians 1:31).

There is another solemn lesson to be learned from the life of Azariah. He began well, but he did not finish well. The same is true of many Christian men and women. I write these words as one who has been a Christian for 67 years and am reminded of the need for continual vigilance. How easy it is to fall prey to the wiles of the devil in our later years. Let us be determined to walk with God. We may then look forward with joy to receiving the commendation of our precious Lord and Saviour (2 Timothy 4:7–8).

The LORD did not turn from the fierceness of his great wrath

Good men sometimes act rashly and an act of folly was to cost Josiah his life, putting an end to his great work of reformation in Judah. The Egyptian king sought passage through his territory to go to battle against the Assyrians who were also Josiah's enemies. His refusal to allow Pharaoh Necho passage through Judah and his desire to fight the Egyptians defied common sense. He ignored the warning of the Egyptian king and lost his life. Here was a godly king who fell through a rash action and the prophet Jeremiah and all Judah lamented for him (2 Chronicles 35:20–25).

After Josiah's death three of his sons reigned over Judah during a period of 23 years:

- Jehoahaz reigned only three months before the Egyptians removed him from the throne.
- Jehoiakim and his brother Zedekiah each reigned for eleven years. They all *did evil in the sight of the LORD* (32, 37; 24:19). Judah was forced to pay tribute to the Egyptians during the reign of Jehoiakim (33–35).

Manasseh had provoked God to such great anger through his wickedness that even Josiah's reforms could not prevent the judgment that was coming to Judah. *Nevertheless the LORD did not turn from the fierceness of his great wrath* (26). These words bear out the message of Huldah the prophetess (22:19). Josiah's reforms removed idolatry from the land but not from the hearts of the people. Though judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem was inevitable, God graciously used Jeremiah to prophesy during those last tragic years before the captivity in Babylon. There was still mercy for those who turned to the Lord from their sin (cp. Jeremiah 6:16). **However wicked the world around us, there is still mercy for sinners who repent. What a glorious message! What a gracious God we worship and proclaim!**

Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart

Josiah's reforms reached into the former northern kingdom where he destroyed the altar at Bethel with its idol. He burned the bones from the nearby tombs on the site of the altar as prophesied by the man of God who came from Judah but the remains of that prophet were left alone (16–20; cp. 1 Kings 13:1–2). Dale Ralph Davis comments, 'This prophetic fulfilment packs a solid assurance. In the present context it bolsters Huldah's prophecy of 22:15–20. If Yahweh's word from 930 BC comes to pass, then surely his word through Huldah in 622 will as well. And if Yahweh's centuries' old prophecies come so clearly to pass, should we not count every syllable from God's mouth as unquestionably reliable?' (2 KINGS – THE POWER AND THE FURY, page 324).

The Jews were commanded to keep the feast of the Passover (Exodus 13:3–10; Deuteronomy 16:1–8) but when Judah was unfaithful to God, the Passover was not observed. Josiah put matters right and commanded the people to keep the Passover (21).

When people turn away from God, false religion and occult practices fill the spiritual vacuum. God hates these things and Josiah cleared the land of spiritist practitioners and household gods (24). Josiah was more thorough in his work of reformation than any earlier king of Judah. *Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses* (25). He was whole-hearted in his devotion to the Lord. Let us be the same! **Have you turned to the LORD with all your heart? Do you pray for the leaders in your church and for those who govern our nation?**

And so it was

The northern kingdom was plunged into chaos and disorder after the death of Jeroboam II. The five kings mentioned in our reading were all wicked men and four of them were assassinated. Zechariah was the last of Jehu's dynasty to reign over Israel. God had promised Jehu, '*Your sons shall sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation.*' *And so it was* (12). Dale Ralph Davis points out that the Hebrew translated '*And so it was*' occurs six times in Genesis chapter 1 (verses 7,9,11,15,24,31). What God spoke actually happened. Israel was passing through dark and troubled times but God kept his Word. The wicked despise and scoff at the Bible, but we must not let them intimidate us. The fact that God's holy Word is true is a great comfort and encouragement to every believer.

The seeds of wickedness sown in Israel over many years had grown to bear their terrible harvest. The phrase, '*He did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin*' is used in relation to four of the five kings of Israel mentioned in this chapter (9,18,24 and 28). Menahem was a vile king who not only murdered his predecessor but who ripped open the pregnant women of his enemies (14–16). The Assyrians were at this time consolidating their power in the Middle-East and they put Israel to tribute during the reigns of Menahem and Pekah (17–22, 29).

God warned Israel through the prophet Hosea, '*I will return again to my place till they acknowledge their offence*' (Hosea 5:15). God withdrew his restraining hand and evil was given its head bringing devastating consequences. **When nations reject God and despise his Word, confusion and wickedness come in like a flood. God is shouting at us, but most of us are not listening to him. We see the evidence of this in the western world and this should drive us to our knees in prayer!**

However the high places were not removed

Jotham the son of Azariah (Uzziah) was a good king who *became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the LORD his God* (2 Chronicles 27:6). This means that he sought to obey God's Word, that he disciplined himself to be holy, and that he had a God-consciousness about his life. Oh, let us be sure to prepare our ways before the Lord; we will then be more aware of the stumbling-blocks that the devil puts in our path. God does honour those who seek to please him and this was so in the experience of Jotham. The prophetic influence of Isaiah was also being felt at this time in Judah.

There is, however, a telling comment about Jotham in these verses: *He did what was right in the sight of the LORD ... however the high places were not removed* (34–35). These pagan shrines and altars were an abomination to God. They had been built during the reign of Rehoboam, son of Solomon (1 Kings 14:22–23) and had survived through the reigns of good kings such as Asa and Jehoshaphat until Jotham's time (cp. 12:3; 15:4; 1 Kings 15:14; 22:43). The high places were a stumbling-block in the life of Judah and should have been destroyed. Jotham's son, Ahaz, was a wicked man who used these high places (16:4).

Do you have any 'high places' which you have failed to remove from your life, that are hindering your walk with the Lord? You may have your own idols such as covetousness (Colossians 3:5); you may cling to besetting sins and make all manner of excuses but you know that you are wrong. Repent of your sin now and honour God in your life. *Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith* (Hebrews 12:1–2).

The king ... made a covenant before the LORD

The Word of God has a great impact on those in whom the Spirit of God is working. Josiah had been convicted through reading the Book of the Law (called here *'the Book of the Covenant'*) and he implemented widespread reforms throughout the nation. He gathered the elders of Judah and the people of Jerusalem to the house of the LORD where he read to them *all the words of the Book of the Covenant* (2). He then *made a covenant before the Lord* and all the people joined with him in this covenant (3).

A covenant is a binding agreement and, in his covenant with us, God commits himself to us and we must also commit ourselves to him. What is involved in covenant relationship with God?

- We must be wholehearted in our obedience to the Word of God (3). One of the effects of Josiah's obedience was to see that the Passover feast was kept (21). Christians are not required to observe the Passover, but we are required to remember the Lord's death by coming to the Lord's Table (1 Corinthians 11:23–26).
- We must remove from our lives all that displeases God. Josiah purged the land of idol worship (4–15). He desecrated and destroyed the pagan shrines and altars; and removed the idolatrous priests who had been appointed by previous kings of Judah. He removed the wooden Asherah image from the temple and burned it. He destroyed the apartments of prostitutes which were in the temple building (4–8).

Christians have also been brought into a covenant relationship with God through the blood of Christ (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 9:14–15; 12:24). We rejoice to know that God is committed to us but the new covenant also demands our love and obedience to Christ (John 14:15). **How real is your commitment to God?** *'Do you not know that ... you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's* (1 Corinthians 6:19–20).

Because your heart was tender

Josiah was the last good king to reign over Judah before the people were taken into Babylonian captivity. You may have noticed that the name of the mother of some of the kings is mentioned before a comment is written on their way of life (1–2; cp. 21:1–2, 19–20). Mothers have a tremendous influence over their children for good or evil (cp. 2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15).

Josiah began to seek God when he was sixteen years old (2 Chronicles 34:3). When he was twenty-six years old he had the house of the Lord repaired (4–7). The faithfulness and integrity of those repairing the temple is recorded in verse 7 (cp. 12:15). While the temple was being repaired, a copy of the Book of the Law (Deuteronomy) was discovered. Shaphan the scribe read the book to Josiah and its warnings that God's wrath would come upon those disregarding its teaching had a profound effect on him (8–13; cp. Deuteronomy 28:15–68). The king tore his clothes (a sign of his distress) and called on Hilkiah the priest, Shaphan the scribe, and his servant Asaiah to inquire of the Lord concerning the words of the book (12–13).

God gave Josiah a reassuring message through Huldah the prophetess (14–20). God told him, *'Because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before the LORD ... I also have heard you'* (19). What kind of effect does the reading or preaching of God's Word have on you? Is your heart tender or hard? Do you obey the Word of God or do you rebel against it? Have you ever humbled yourself before the Lord or wept over your sin? **If your heart is tender, God will hear your prayers.**

*O give me, Lord, the tender heart
That trembles at the approach of sin;
A godly fear of sin impart,
Implant and root it deep within,
That I may dread thy gracious power
And never dare to offend thee more.*

(Charles Wesley)

Urijah the priest built an altar

Ahaz was a wicked king who *did not do what was right in the sight of the LORD his God, as his father David had done* (2). The word 'father' in this context means 'ancestor'. He knew what was right *in the sight of the LORD from the example of his father* as well as hearing the prophetic ministry of Isaiah. He was more like a wicked king of Israel than a king of Judah; he practised child sacrifice and idol worship. (3–4). *The Lord brought Judah low* because of him. He was *'continually unfaithful to the LORD'* and *'increasingly unfaithful to the LORD'* (2 Chronicles 28:19, 22). When an alliance between the kings of Syria and Israel came to attack him, the prophet Isaiah encouraged him to trust in the Lord. Ahaz chose to trust in the Assyrian king and his army for whom he plundered the house of the Lord (5–9; cp. Isaiah 7:1–13).

Ahaz went to Damascus the Syrian capital to meet Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria. He saw a pagan altar in Damascus and was so impressed that he had a replica made for the temple in Jerusalem. He sent a copy of the design to Urijah the priest who *built an altar*. Ahaz returned from Damascus and made offerings on this altar and desecrated the temple with no protest from Urijah (10–18). He sacrificed to the Syrian gods reasoning, *'Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me.'* *But they were the ruin of him* (2 Chronicles 28:23). He was very perverse in his reasoning for he knew that these gods had not been able to save the Syrians from their enemies.

Ahaz wanted a religion which would allow him to continue in his sin, a religion with plenty of ritual but lacking in righteousness. **There are still many people like Ahaz who want a benign god who is at their beck and call, who makes no demands upon them. Such a god does not exist except in the fantasy of false religion.** The Lord demands our total allegiance and expects us to lead holy lives (Luke 9:23–25; Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 1:15). How is it with you? Is your religion a sham or a living reality?

They ... sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD

This chapter describes the end of the northern kingdom. Israel had become a vassal state to Assyria during the reign of Hoshea who later rebelled. The prophet Hosea likened Israel ('Ephraim') to '*a silly dove, without sense*' which called to Egypt for help and protection and then turned to Assyria but she did not trust in the Lord (Hosea 7:11). King Menahem submitted to Assyria and paid tribute to him (15:17–20). King Hoshea changed his nation's allegiance from Assyria to Egypt (3–4). The Assyrians then attacked Israel and Hoshea was thrown into prison and the whole nation was transported into exile (1–6).

The Israelites came under God's judgment for their persistent wickedness. They *secretly did against the LORD their God things that were not right* (9) but they were foolish to think that God did not see their wicked deeds. What was their sin?

- They turned away from the Lord to worship idols (9–12, 15–16).
- The Lord was gracious and patient with them, sending his prophets to urge them to turn from their evil ways. They were stubborn in their rebellion against God, refusing to listen to his prophets (13–16).
- They practised witchcraft and soothsaying (17).
- *They ... sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD* (17).

What an appalling thing to do! It is little wonder that *the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them from his sight* (18).

When God removes us from his sight, it does not mean that he no longer sees us, but that we no longer enjoy his smile upon our lives. We lose his blessings and we are exposed and helpless in the face of Satan's attacks. If you are backsliding, let these verses be a warning to you. **To lose the enjoyment of sweet fellowship with God is to lose a priceless possession and nothing in this world is able to fill the void that remains!**

*What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill.*

(William Cowper)

All that he did, and the sin he committed — are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?

Manasseh was only twelve years of age when he came to the throne and his fifty-five year reign was the longest in Judah's history. He plunged the land into the most appalling wickedness during a long reign of terror and he was a zealous idol worshipper. He rebuilt the high places that his father had destroyed and desecrated the house of the Lord by placing pagan altars in its courts and an idol within its walls. He sacrificed his son, *practised soothsaying, used witchcraft, and consulted spiritists and mediums* (3–7). Manasseh seduced Judah to do more evil than the nations whom God had driven out of Canaan (9). He ruthlessly crushed all opposition to his wicked reign and *shed very much innocent blood* (16).

We learn from 2 Chronicles 33:10–13 that Manasseh was taken to Babylon by the Assyrians and imprisoned there. He was humbled in his affliction and sought God, repenting of his sin, but personal repentance does not remove the terrible effects of past sins. Judah had become set on a course of wickedness and God warned that his judgment on Jerusalem and Judah would be thorough and awesome: '*I am bringing such calamity upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle ... I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. So I will forsake the remnant of my inheritance and deliver them into the hand of their enemies ... because they have done evil in my sight*' (12–15). Manasseh's regrets and repentance made little impact on his son Amon whose short, evil reign was brought to an end by assassination (19–26).

All that he did, and the sin that he committed — are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? (17). Our sins and deeds may not be recorded in any human document but they are recorded in God's books which will be opened on the day of judgment (Revelation 20:12). **What is being written in those books concerning your life?**

Hezekiah was attentive to them

The Babylonians were beginning to assert their independence from their Assyrian masters and were seeking to gain allies. They heard of Hezekiah's recovery from his illness and sent envoys to him with friendly letters and a present (12). Alec Motyer writing of this event says, 'If we take 687 as the precise date for the death of Hezekiah and the fifteen years of (Isaiah) 38:5 as an exact figure, the ambassadors came in 702' (COMMENTARY ON ISAIAH, page 296). The Assyrian attack on Jerusalem in which the Lord destroyed their army followed soon after (19:35).

Hezekiah was attentive to them, and showed them all his treasures (13). *God withdrew from him, in order to test him* (2 Chronicles 32:31) but he fell miserably short by becoming proud in heart: *But Hezekiah did not repay according to the favour shown him, for his heart was lifted up* (2 Chronicles 32:25). If we are not humble we will surely stumble or cause others to stumble.

There is no evidence that he acknowledged the goodness of God to him for his recovery during the visit of the Babylonians. The Lord sent Isaiah to warn him that a day would come when all the treasures so proudly displayed would be plundered by the Babylonians and his descendants carried off captive. Selfish Hezekiah accepted the word of the Lord as good saying, '*Will there not be peace and truth at least in my days?*' (14–19). He should have been bitterly sorry that his folly would lead to trouble and heartache long after his death.

Many a Christian has stumbled through failing to recognise the wiles of the devil. Satan may sometimes seek to entice us away from the Lord with the flattery of the ungodly. This may make us feel good so that we become proud and do not give the slightest hint that we belong to Christ. How tragic!

They feared the LORD, yet served their own gods

After the people of the northern kingdom went into exile, the king of Assyria resettled the land with foreigners from Babylonia, which was in subjection to Assyria at that time. These people did not know nor fear God and some of them were killed when he sent lions among them (24–25). Heathen people in those times associated each territory with the gods its people worshipped. The Jews were different for they knew that there is only one God who reigns over all the earth.

The new settlers appealed to the king of Assyria for help and he sent a Jewish priest to instruct the people. This man had a great opportunity to win the people to the Lord but he was probably a very confused man who paid little attention to God's law. He took up residence at Bethel where Jeroboam I had set up an altar with a golden calf (1 Kings 12). Though the settlers were taught to fear the Lord, they placed their own idols in the high places which had been left by the Israelites. *They feared the LORD, yet served their own gods* (33,41). Their fear came from superstition rather than the reverence which leads to obedience of God's commands and is mentioned in verses 28,32,33 and 41). The true fear of God is spoken of in verses 25, 36 and 39; it banishes the fear of other gods. Matthew Henry comments that they 'worshipped the God of Israel for fear, and their own idols for love'.

The fear of the Lord excludes involvement with all other religions.

We too live in confusing times and some men who claim to be Christian ministers teach that other religions are just as acceptable to God as Christianity. They are no different from the confused settlers who dwelt in Samaria. Matthew Henry described such religion as 'mongrel religion'. There is much 'mongrel religion' around us today. Have nothing to do with it! Beware also of a more subtle form of idolatry which is covetousness and of 'gods' such as materialism. Are you seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness? (Matthew 6:33).

He trusted in the LORD God of Israel

Hezekiah was one of the best kings to reign over Judah. He had seen the dreadful effects of idolatry in the life of his father, Ahaz (2 Chronicles 28:22–23) and he destroyed the idol shrines in the land. He also *broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made* (1–4). You may recall that God commanded Moses to make the serpent for the people to gaze upon and be healed of their serpent bites (Numbers 21:4–9). It had become venerated as a religious relic so that it was just as much an idol as any image of the god Baal. Hezekiah knew that it was only ‘*Nehushtan*’ (a piece of bronze) and he smashed it. Religious relics do not aid true worship; they offend God!

We are told several things about Hezekiah:

- *He trusted in the LORD God of Israel* (5). He placed his confidence in God and it showed in his life.
- *He held fast to the LORD* (6). God was a reality in his life and Hezekiah clung to him.
- He followed God and kept his commandments (6). He believed and obeyed the Word of God. He not only removed the pagan shrines from the land but he had the temple thoroughly cleaned and he promoted the worship of Jehovah (2 Chronicles 29).

God blesses those who trust and obey him. God was with Hezekiah and prospered him. The Assyrians had received tribute from Judah during the reign of Ahaz (16:8,18) and Hezekiah rebelled against paying this money to them (7–8).

We are also reminded in these verses that disobedience to God brings his judgment upon us. The northern kingdom (Israel) was conquered by the Assyrians and went into captivity *because they did not obey the voice of the LORD their God, but transgressed his covenant and all that Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded* (9–12; cp. 17:21–23).

I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears

The events in this chapter pre-date those in chapters 18 and 19 by some years. Verse 6 shows that Jerusalem’s deliverance from the Assyrians was yet to come and the fact that Hezekiah’s coffers were full (13) makes sense **before** he had to pay tribute to Sennacherib (18:13–16). The Lord had promised Hezekiah that he would deliver both him and Jerusalem from the Assyrians. This was **after** Hezekiah’s illness.

Hezekiah became very ill, probably suffering from poisoning of his system which had gathered into a large boil (7). Isaiah brought him a message from God telling him that he was going to die from this illness. The distressed king was driven to seek the face of God in prayer (1–3). We can calculate that Hezekiah was thirty-nine years of age at this time and in the prime of his life (18:2,13; Isaiah 38:10). .

Isaiah was still in the palace premises when the Lord told him to return to Hezekiah with another message, ‘*I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears*’ (5). Hezekiah would go to the house of the Lord on the third day and the Lord also promised to extend his life by fifteen years (4–6). God gave him a miraculous sign to confirm his promise causing the shadow of the sun-dial to go back ten degrees (8–11). Isaiah instructed Hezekiah’s servants to put a poultice of figs on the boil and he recovered (7).

If you are suffering from a serious illness, always remember that God is dealing with you in great love and wisdom. He will always be with you in life and in death (Romans 8:35–39).

*The King of love my Shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his
And he is mine for ever.*

*And so through all the length of days
Thy goodness faileth never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
Within thy house for ever.*

(Henry W. Baker)

That which you have prayed to me ... I have heard

The Lord sent a reassuring message to Hezekiah, promising that because he had prayed, the Assyrians would be punished for their blasphemy (20–31). The Bible stresses the great need for prayer in the life of every believer (Luke 18:1; Ephesians 6:18) and when we pray, we come to the almighty God who loves us. Dale Ralph Davis comments, ‘Yahweh does not ignore us, but delights to grant our pleas. Apparently he loves to lift our anguish. Our prayers matter to him. We forget that’ (2 KINGS – THE POWER AND THE FURY, page 282).

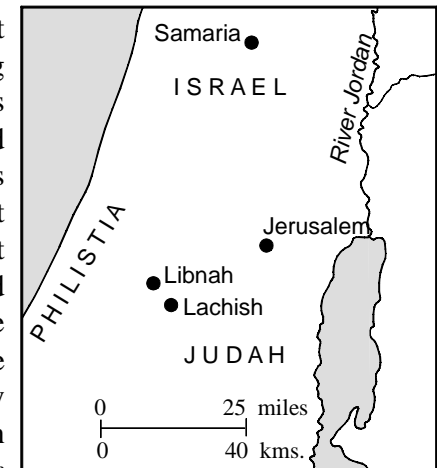
The Assyrians had not realised that they owed their past victories to the sovereign purposes of God (25). They put hooks in the noses of their captives before marching them away to exile. God said to Sennacherib, ‘*Because of your rage against me ... Therefore I will put my hook in your nose and my bridle in your lips, and I will turn you back ...*’ (28). The Lord gave a sign to prove that the destruction of the Assyrian attackers was not a chance happening. Normal agricultural of the devastated land would not be possible but it would yield sufficient food for two years. In the third year they would be able to till the ground and sow their seed (29–30). The king of Assyria would not be able to conquer Jerusalem because the Lord was defending the city (32–34).

The angel of the Lord destroyed the Assyrian army in one night and Sennacherib was later assassinated while worshipping his useless god, Nisroch (36–38). Those who mock God do so at their peril and they are very foolish. *He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the LORD shall hold them in derision* (Psalm 2:4).

Let us close by thinking about the words of God concerning Hezekiah, ‘*That which you have prayed to me ... I have heard*’ (20). Prayer makes all the difference! Are we encouraged by answers to our prayers because we have prayed? Or are we weak and discouraged because we have not prayed (James 4:2)? **Martin Luther rightly observed, ‘Prayer is not overcoming God’s reluctance, but laying hold of his willingness.’ Let us be more faithful in prayer!**

Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was in the house of the LORD

Hezekiah was brave to rebel against the Assyrians who were conquering the nations around Judah, but his faith failed when they attacked Judah. They took the fortified cities of Judah and were encamped at Lachish, 25 miles to the south-west of Jerusalem. Hezekiah sent word to the Assyrian king to say that he had done wrong (when he had done right). He promised to pay whatever tribute he imposed upon him. *So Hezekiah gave him all the*



silver that was in the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the king’s house. He also stripped the gold from the temple in order to meet the Assyrian demands (13–16).

Hezekiah’s weakness brought only a short-lived respite from the Assyrian invaders who were preparing to attack Jerusalem. The Assyrian army chief and other officials came to demand the surrender of the city (17). We shall be seeing how the Lord gave Hezekiah a wonderful deliverance in a desperate situation.

These verses teach us that our faith will be tested (1 Peter 1:6–7). We may trust in the Lord and be faithful to him and yet suffer (John 15:18–21). We may have seen wonderful answers to prayer but Heaven appears to ignore our tears and cries for a loved-one who dies with cancer or some other severe illness. We may be baffled and bewildered by grief, loss or tragedy, but the Lord will never remove his love from us (Romans 8:35–39). **Let us take heart, the Lord does not abandon us! ***

* I warmly commend the book by Jerry Bridges, TRUSTING GOD EVEN WHEN LIFE HURTS, published by Navpress.

What confidence is this in which you trust?

2 Kings 18:17 to 20:21 are almost identical to Isaiah chapters 36 to 39 except for the psalm written by Hezekiah after he recovered from his illness (Isaiah 38:9–20). Sennacherib, the Assyrian king, had accepted the tribute he had imposed on Hezekiah, but he now demanded the unconditional surrender of Jerusalem (13–16, 17–37).

The Rabshakeh (Assyrian army chief of staff) tried to scare the people of Jerusalem into submission, speaking in Hebrew to make certain that everyone understood his threats (26). He rightly scorned the futility of relying on Egypt for help (21) and added that Hezekiah had alienated Jehovah by removing the high places from the land. The reverse was true; these were places of idol worship and had no connection with the worship of the Lord (22). The Assyrian mocked the weakness of Judah and then claimed that the Lord had told him to go up to destroy her (22–25). He urged the people not to listen to Hezekiah (29–31).

The Rabshakeh also scorned any trust in Jehovah, asking, ‘*What confidence is this in which you trust?*’ (19) and he blasphemed God (32–35). Hezekiah’s servants Hilkiyah, Shebna and Joah were terrified at his words and tore their garments in their distress. They then went to the king and told him all that the Assyrian had said (37).

There have been scoffers throughout history (Acts 17:32; 2 Peter 3:3) and we must not allow such people to intimidate us. Trusting in men and their schemes is futile, but it is not vain to trust in the Lord. He is the glorious, all-powerful sovereign Creator of the world. He will never fail us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5–6).

*A sovereign protector I have,
Unseen, yet for ever at hand,
Unchangeably faithful to save,
Almighty to rule and command.
He smiles and my comforts abound;
His grace as the dew shall descend
And walls of salvation surround
The soul he delights to defend.* (Augustus M. Toplady)

Hezekiah ... spread it before the LORD

Hezekiah joined his servants in tearing his clothes and putting on sackcloth, an expression of distress and penitence. What was the distraught king to do in a time of severe crisis when his country was threatened with destruction and his own life was in danger? He went to the house of God and also sought the prayers of the prophet Isaiah who sent back a very reassuring message. He was not to be afraid; God would deal with Sennacherib, causing him to return to his own land where he would be killed (1–7).

The Assyrian king again sent messengers to Hezekiah, bearing a letter for Hezekiah which blasphemed God (8–13). What did the king do? *Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD* (14). He then uttered a great prayer of confidence in God the sovereign Creator of heaven and earth: ‘*O LORD God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, you are God ... you have made heaven and earth. Incline your ear, O LORD, and hear ...*’ (15–16). He was realistic in his assessment of the military might of Assyria but the nations they had conquered were worshippers of useless idols which were powerless to save them. He knew that God could easily deliver Judah from the Assyrians and he prayed that the Lord would be glorified in their deliverance from the Assyrians (17–19).

What should we do when we receive bad news, when everything seems to be going wrong for us? **We must come to God in prayer, remembering that he is sovereign and that he is in control of all of our circumstances.** We must spread the situation before him and bring our praises as well as our petitions to him. He will never fail us! Why do we so often sink under trials and difficulties? Surely it is because we neglect prayer and do not spread our troubles before the Lord.

*O what peace we often forfeit!
O what needless pain we bear!
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer* (Joseph M. Scriven)