

The Old-Time Evangelistic News

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How Will You Be Remembered? (Part 9)

I Kings 14:16; II Kings 12:2; II Kings 18:5

Last month we started considering **A Man of Consistency—Hezekiah**. Of the three kings, he obviously is the one that we should desire to be like. But although everyone would say that they want to be like him, very few of us will live our lives as he did. Notice that the description of this man of consistency begins with His Purgings. No life will be pleasing to God without ridding that life of things that are repugnant with God. I hear it all the time, “I do not like ‘negative’ preaching.” Do you know what that tells me about the person who says that? They do not like what God says. Most of Scripture is filled with “negative” things. I have said it before, but it needs to be repeated because people apparently do not know what God’s Word says. Eight of the ten commandments are negative—7 contain the word not and one contains the word no. When God commissioned Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1:10, God described his ministry with four negative things and two positive.

There are many other examples in the Old Testament that could be given, but we will quickly mention some in the New Testament. In Ephesians 4:25-5:17, the expectations of the Christian life are listed. Some are positive and some are negative. You cannot be what God wants you to be unless you eliminate from your life what God does not want in your life. A similar passage is found in Colossians 1:5-17. In this passage, we are told what to get out of our lives and what to put in our lives. To be right with God—to be pleasing to God—we must obey God by putting away things that offend God.

As we look at Hezekiah’s life, there are four verbs and accompanying objects that describe the purging that Hezekiah performed. The first action of Hezekiah was the removal of the high

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places. The high places, as the word indicates, were elevated places of worship. From the study of history, it seems that all nations had some form of high place where sacrifices were offered. In Deuteronomy 12:2-4, God told the Israelites to destroy all of the places where the heathen nations had made sacrifices. In the succeeding verses (11-14), God established one place of sacrifice—it would be the city of Jerusalem and the temple. Sadly, it seems that Israel never completely obeyed God.

From the beginning of the nation, Israel had left the high places. Sometimes they would worship God on them, and other times they would worship idols. Even during the reigns of good men like Asa and Jehoshaphat, the high places were left. Hezekiah became the first king to remove them. He was obeying God completely. I am sure that he faced opposition. Perhaps some said, “We can worship God there like others before us have done.” But Hezekiah knew what God had said to do to those high places. God wanted them destroyed completely. Hezekiah did so.

That shows me a couple of things about being a man of consistency. First, he knows the Word of God. Hezekiah knew that God said to destroy them in Deuteronomy. Even though 800 years had passed, God’s Word had not changed. Others had left them, but Hezekiah was intent on obeying God. The second thing that we can learn comes from the last sentence. A man of consistency will do what God says even if others may not have completely obeyed God. Samuel, Solomon, Asa, and Jehoshaphat had either made sacrifices or left the high places standing. These were good men that had previously followed God, but failed to remove what God said to remove. Hezekiah, in spite of the failure of others, followed God. It would have been easy to give in on this point, but Hezekiah determined to follow God. We will expand upon this thought later, but we must look to God’s Word for our actions, not men. We can find help and guidance in reading about men of the past, but just because a seemingly good man did something, does not make it right. God’s Word is what we must follow, not the ways of man. Hezekiah

read what God said and tore down the high places. May we search God's Word and see what is not pleasing to God, and then remove it from our life.

Hezekiah also "*brake the images*" (II Kings 18:4). This may not have been as controversial as the first action because this violated one of the ten commandments and all of Israel knew what they said. Again, here is Hezekiah putting in practice the Word of God. Judah had begun worshiping idols under Ahaz. One false god that is mentioned specifically was Baalim (II Chronicles 28:2). How widespread this idolatry was is not known. I am sure that some still worshiped God, but the nation as a whole had turned to idolatry. How many idols were there? The Bible does not say. Perhaps Ahaz had set up different places to worship as Jeroboam had done many years before in Israel. Perhaps some wealthy people had idols in their homes. The Bible does not give any specific details, but I believe that Hezekiah's purging of the idols definitely went to the public places and perhaps to personal idols as well. Hezekiah loved the Lord. He was king and as the leader of the nation, he was intent on leading the nation in the worship of the only true God, Jehovah. Anything else that would take the place of God would be eliminated by Hezekiah.

Now most people, especially saved people, would say today, "I have no idols in my life." Is that true? We know about the idolatry of Israel and Judah that is recorded in the Old Testament, but the New Testament records commandments against idols as well. I John 5:21, the last verse of that book, says, "*Little children, keep yourselves from idols.*" John has used the term little children in I John to refer to young believers. This prohibition means that even saved people can have idols. It may not be a statue made of metal, stone, or wood, but it could be anything that you care about more than God. Do you spend more time upon things that satisfy or fulfill the flesh than you do on things that satisfy the spiritual man? What is the focus of your life—fleshly things or spiritual things? When you examine your life that way, you may find yourself ridding your life of idols—things that have been more important than God has been.

The third statement in II Kings 18:4 describing Hezekiah's purging says, "*and cut down the groves.*" The groves were a place of trees devoted to the worship of Ashtaroth, the female counterpart to Baal. This worship is mentioned many times throughout the Old Testament when Israel went into idolatry. God had warned about this in Deuteronomy 16:21 when He said, "*Thou shalt not plant thee a grove of any trees near unto the altar of the LORD thy God, which thou shalt make thee.*" God not only prohibited the use of trees in idolatry, but He also prohibited the planting of trees near His altar. Israel could not worship like the world. Their worship of God was to be unique and distinct. There is much to learn from this. Our worship today should be different from the world's worship of their god, even if they claim it is the same God. God has not changed in what He expects of His people. The Israelites were not to mingle the world's way with God's way. We must do the same! We cannot mingle the world's way (be it music, dress, or anything else) with God's way. Everything about the believer, from living our life to our worship of God, is to be different.

Hezekiah cut down the groves that were used in idolatry, and if there were any around that were supposedly being used for God, he cut them down too. Hezekiah had one purpose in mind—to follow God completely. What a wonderful desire! We can see that in how far Hezekiah went in purging Judah of their idolatry. He did a complete job. What do we need to purge from our lives? May we be willing to follow God's Word completely just like Hezekiah.

But Hezekiah is not finished. The final statement about Hezekiah's purging states, "*and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made.*" How terrible and vile sin will make us! By this time the people of Judah were burning incense (a form of worship) to something that was a precious memory of God's mercy and miraculous deliverance. Almost 800 years earlier God had told Moses to make this brasen serpent. The people looked at it and were healed of the snake bites that they had suffered. It was a wonderful memory, but they had turned it into an idol.

Do you see what sin can do? It can take something wonderful and turn it into something that God hates. This was something that God had said to make, but the people turned it into something wicked. I am sure that some told Hezekiah to keep it, but it was too late. The brasen serpent was now an idol. It too must be destroyed.

It is interesting to see that all of these things can be justified in one's mind as if he is doing it for God. The high places were often used to worship God. Some images could have been made for God. The groves could have been grown for God. The brasen serpent was made under God's command. But God rejected all of them. He did not accept worship any way but the way that He told Moses to do it from Exodus through Deuteronomy. Any other way was wrong, no matter who was doing it or how much it seemed right in their eyes. God had said not to use them, even for Him. God's Word must be obeyed. Hezekiah obeyed God's Word completely. May we be like Hezekiah and obey God's Word completely.