

Two Letters - Two Replies - Two Results

by J. Vernon McGee

Hezekiah's faith and humility in prayer led to God's intervention and deliverance from the Assyrian army, while his response to the letter from Beradac-Baladan led to spiritual danger.

Duration: 44:50

Scripture: 2 Kings 19:14, Isaiah 1:18, Matthew 6:33, John 14:6, Romans 3:23, Ephesians 2:8-9

Topics: "Pride And Humility", "Resisting Temptation"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher tells a story about a stag who was ashamed of his scrawny legs but had impressive antlers. The stag's pride and flattery led to his downfall when he got caught in a tree and was torn apart by hounds. The preacher uses this story to illustrate how many people today are susceptible to flattery and pride, which prevents them from seeking salvation. He also mentions the importance of resisting flattery and the need for a 'fifth freedom' from it.

Transcript

This is Through the Bible Sunday Sermon Program number 1565 for Sunday, February 2nd, 2003. How firm a foundation ye saints of the Lord is laid for your faith in his excellent word. What more can ye say? Long before the telegraph, the telephone, or email, people would communicate through letters.

Letter writing dates back to several thousand years before Christ. Many museums have been filled with the correspondence of princes and paupers of civilizations now long gone. One thing that is revealing in all these letters is the fact that many are much like ours today.

A woman writing to her sister about the birth of her new child, a soldier writing to his wife while he is away on assignment, and a man informing his siblings of the death of their father. Then, of course, there is the correspondence of kings, which could include a letter of taxation, a note of surrender, or maybe a proposal for peace. So what would you do if you received a letter from a king? Well, there was a day when Hezekiah, the king of Judah, received two different letters from his counterparts in two separate nations.

Our Bible teacher, Dr. J. Vernon McGee, is going to allow us to peek over the shoulder of Hezekiah as he deals with two letters, two replies, two results. It was during his 21-year pastorate at the historic Church of the Open Door in downtown Los Angeles that Dr. McGee first gave this sermon. Let's go to our Lord in prayer.

Father, bless Your Word as it goes out today. May it minister to the hearts of all who hear it. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. Now this morning our subject is Two Letters, Two Replies, Two Results. And today we are turning to two letters that was received by King Hezekiah.

Writing enters the arena of history in approximately 3200 B.C. It was the pictograph script of the Sumerians in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley. That is the oldest known writing that man has today. Then there comes the cuneiform writing of the Babylonians.

It appears next. It was made on soft and wet clay cylinders and then they were baked for permanent record. The fact of the matter is libraries have been discovered where books were written in just that way.

Then the next form to appear was the papyrus, about 2800 B.C. It was made out of the pulp that came out of the paper reeds of Egypt that grew at that time along the River Nile and yet God made a strange prophecy that those paper reeds would disappear which they have done by the way. But that was a great business in Egypt and today they are literally mound upon mound of this form of writing that have been found. Then about 2500 B.C. parchments appear and they were the skins of goats and sheep and that's where we get our term volume.

We call this book here a volume. It's actually not a volume. A volume is something that's round, something like we get our word volleyball from the same word.

Well, this book is not round but we call it a volume because it was rolled up in scrolls, these parchments were, and we find them appearing about 2500 B.C. It's interesting that one of the first arguments that the higher critics made concerning the Bible was that Moses did not write the Pentitude, the first five books of the Bible, and the reason was writing was not in existence in his day. May I say that that hypothesis has long since been exploded and we know now that writing was very common in Moses' day. It was a common means of expression.

And then letter writing appeared soon on the scene. It's one of the oldest forms of communication. It was likewise very popular.

Tons of clay tablets have been turned up and literally mountains of papyri on which letters were written that come out of the ancient world. Babylon had a postal system that I think would put ours to shame. That, of course, wouldn't be too much but it would.

And they had a system whereby letters were written and went through a mail system and expressed every kind of a thought that ever passed through the human mind. There were form letters written. There were love letters that were written.

And past due bills were sent through the mail in that day. May I say that it was a time when deep calls unto deep and men wrote letters. And in the word of God, the highest form of expression that you have in our Bible is the letter form.

You see, God started off by speaking to man in law in the first five books of the Bible. Then God spoke to man through history. Then God spoke to man through poetry.

Then God spoke to man through prophecy. And when you come to the New Testament, God continued to speak to man through history and prophecy. Then he gave the Gospels.

Then he gave something new. He wrote love letters to the church. And all the letters of the Apostle Paul are actually love letters from the Lord Jesus Christ to those that are his own.

And when Paul wrote down, My dearly beloved and longed for, it's the Lord Jesus Christ expressing from his heart how he feels this morning about you. And that's the way we ought to read the epistles in the New Testament. They are love letters from him to us today.

So letters have been the highest form and one of the oldest forms of expression. Now back in the days of Hezekiah, we know that letter writing was in existence because they found what is known today as the Samaritan or Straker. It comes from the reign of Jeroboam II just about this period.

And it reveals that letter writing was very popular and common in the days of Hezekiah. And therefore, we are not surprised, I hope, that when we come to the reign of Hezekiah, we find that there are two letters that we have that came to this man through the mail of that day. Two letters came to him.

One was postmarked Assyria and the other was postmarked Babylon. Those two letters are so important that they actually divide his reign. You find the dark side and the light side set forth by these two letters.

They are very important and the first letter was a letter of blasphemy, bitterness, and blackmail. The second letter was a letter of flattery, felicitation, and friendship. The first letter, the letter of blasphemy, came from the king of Assyria.

The second letter, the letter of felicitation, came from the king of Babylon. The letter from Assyria was accompanied with threats. The letter from Babylon was accompanied with gifts.

And we find in these two letters the transfer of power from Assyria, a world power, to Babylon, another world power. In fact, this particular section is so important that God saw fit to record it, not once, not twice, but three times in his Word. Now we have seen as we've been going through Chronicles that God recorded in Chronicles those things that he took delight in.

He repeated them because he liked them. And everything in Chronicles is something he repeated so that when we read about these two letters in Kings, we get the history. When we read about these two letters in Chronicles, we see that God's putting and attaching an importance to these two letters.

But when you turn to the prophecy of Isaiah and find this thing given again, you say, My God is putting up now a stop, look, listen sign. And he says this is very important for you people in the 20th century that are so busy. I have something to tell you here.

And I repeated it three times and I don't usually repeat. One time is enough for God to say anything. So this morning, I want us to open up the correspondence of Hezekiah.

I want us to go to the file and ask his secretary if she will not take out of the file, the private file of Hezekiah, these two letters. The first letter comes in under the letter S. S. And the particular file is Sennacherib because he's the one who wrote the letter. And here's the file.

He has, as you can see, Hezekiah had a very efficient secretary or capable. She knew the alphabet. She immediately got S for us here.

So will you notice this? S. Sennacherib. Will you listen to the letter that we have before us here? It's in 2 Chronicles, the 32nd chapter, if you please, the 9th verse. After this did Sennacherib, king of Assyria, send his servants to Jerusalem, but he himself laid siege against Lachish and all his power with him unto Hezekiah, king of Judah, and unto all Judah that were at Jerusalem.

Now we drop down to verse 17. He wrote also letters to rail on the Lord God of Israel and to speak against him, saying, now here is the content of the letter, As the gods of the nations of other lands have not delivered their people out of mine hand, so shall not the God of Hezekiah deliver his people out of mine hand. Now the occasion for the letter was this.

The king of Assyria had taken the northern kingdom and he thought he'd make a clean sweep of it. Since the northern kingdom fell so easily, he besieged Jerusalem, but he himself did not come. He sent one of the biggest-mouthed generals that the world's ever seen, and the world's had some big-mouthed generals.

And this man, Rabshakeh, came down and screamed at the children of Israel as they were on the walls of Jerusalem to surrender. He himself went over to Lachish and laid siege there of that. And by the way, that was a great library city.

And he thought he'd just make a clean sweep of the land. And Rabshakeh said, You just well surrendered. There's no use you putting up a fight.

Every, every nation so far, even greater than you are, has fallen before the king of Assyria, my master. And Sennacherib, the gods are with him. Your God, whoever he is, could not deliver you.

And so it was in that kind of a turmoil and situation that the king of Egypt decided he'd come up because he was in danger. So he sent an army out, and Sennacherib thought it would be best for him to consolidate his army, so he called off the siege of Jerusalem. But before he left, he said to Rabshakeh, Deliver this letter to Hezekiah.

He thinks because I'm leaving here right now that that means he's escaped, he's wrong. Just soon as I take care of the king of Egypt, I'll be back. And I'll take care of Hezekiah.

And let him not, and this is a letter of blasphemy, let him not trust his God because the God of Hezekiah will not deliver him out of my hand because my God is strong. Now, what do you do when you get a letter like that? Well, the thing that I'm sure many of us would do is sit down and say to our secretary, Take a letter. I'll get this fellow told.

Well, I want you to notice how he answered this letter. I turn back to 2 Kings, the 19th chapter, the 14th verse, and will you listen to this? And Hezekiah received the letter of the hand of the messengers and read it. And Hezekiah went up into the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord.

That's what he did with the letter. He didn't answer to Nachoreb at all. And you know, friends, there's a great deal of correspondence today that doesn't need to be answered directly.

It needs to be just spread out before God in prayer. And there's so many things in our lives that do not need to be answered. Oh, so many times we think we have to defend ourselves or defend somebody else or write a letter to explain something when it'd be a wonderful thing if we did what this man did, take the letter and spread it before the Lord.

That's what he did. And what a beautiful picture you have here of faith on the part of Hezekiah because he is written down in Scripture as being the greatest king from David on. There's no one greater than this man here.

And we have here a picture of humility on the part of Hezekiah, a picture of faith and a picture of utter dependence upon God. He just went and laid the matter before the Lord. He said, Lord, here's a letter I got.

I don't know what to do with it. I don't know how to answer it. I do not know how to meet it.

All I know is this, that this king has not challenged me, he's challenged you. And I want you to move into the picture and I want you to answer him that there might come glory to your name through it all. And the interesting thing is that Isaiah was joined here, or at least Hezekiah was joined by Isaiah in prayer.

Well, you notice back in 2 Chronicles, the 32nd chapter, the 20th verse, and for this cause Hezekiah the king and the prophet Isaiah, the son of Amos, prayed and cried to heaven. So Isaiah joined him in prayer. And you know, my beloved, after this prayer meeting, you can be sure of one thing, that faith like this and prayer like this will not go unrewarded.

God had told these people through the father, the great-great-grandfather of Hezekiah through David back in Psalm 50, verse 15, Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee and thou shalt see my glory. God says that's what I'll do if you call upon me in the day of trouble. And Hezekiah, in this very humble way, utter dependence upon God, Isaiah the prophet joined him in prayer and they lay this letter out before the Lord and they say, Lord, here's what he says.

Here's what he's going to do. We want an answer from you. My beloved, God answered.

God heard and answered their prayer. Verse 21, And the Lord sent an angel which cut off all the mighty men of valor and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land.

And when he was coming to the house of his God, they that came forth of his own being slew him there with the sword. And profane history says that when Sennacherib returned back to Nineveh and went in to worship yonder in the house of his God that his own sons waylaid him and murdered him in order to take the throne. And this was fulfilled literally as God said that it would be fulfilled.

The book of Chronicles does not give us the details of how the angel of the Lord went through the camp of the Syrians and 185,000 perished. It's very interesting how this is recorded. Back in the 19th chapter of 2 Kings and I'd like to turn there for just a moment to look at this particular verse.

It's verse 35. It came to pass that night that the angel of the Lord went out and smote in the camp of the Assyrians 104 score and 5,000 and when they arose early in the morning behold they were all dead corpses. I love that expression.

When they arose in the morning they were dead corpses but they didn't rise in the morning. And there's only one kind of a corpse and that's the dead corpse. You see the writer here wanted to impress upon your mind and my mind that the next morning when other people got up they didn't get up.

They were all dead corpses. God had intervened directly. God had answered the letter personally that Sennacherib had written to King Hezekiah and a mighty deliverance was wrought for God's people.

Let's look at the second letter and we'll ask the secretary of Hezekiah this morning to go to the file. She knows the alphabet, you know. We're going to ask her now to look under B if you don't mind.

Look under B. And we're looking now for Beradac-Baladan King of Babylon. You're bound to find it under the B's there. If it's Baladan, if it's Beradac or Babylon it's in there somewhere so we want to see it this morning.

And so we find it under the B's. And here it is. 2 Kings 20, the 12th verse.

And will you notice here at that time Beradac-Baladan, the son of Baladan, King of Babylon sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick. Now here's the letter. It's from the King of Babylon and this time his name is Beradac-Baladan.

Very interesting this king here. We don't seem to know too much about him other than this, that the same words in the Hebrew alphabet the Hebrew alphabet had no vowels and the same letters though that are here are in the same word for Nimrod the first king of Babylon. And that should have alerted Hezekiah immediately that this man could not be too good a friend.

You see when Hezekiah got sick unto death God intervened and spared his life and it was at the same time by the way that the king of Assyria had laid siege around the city and at that time God spared this man's life and extended 15 years in fact told him you will live 15 more years which he did. It was a great mistake, a grave mistake by the way but he lived 15 more years and it was something that caught on because of the fact that the we're told that the sundial retreated 15 degrees and that word got around throughout the world in that day. The king of Babylon a kingdom that's just now coming to the front he heard of it.

Well he said that's a very wonderful thing and I'm rejoicing that King Hezekiah that he's gotten well and so what he really sent was a good way a get well note. He said I'm so glad that you improved I'm glad that you got well and so he sent him a get well note and you know when Hezekiah got this letter he was flattered. The fact of the matter is he I think showed it to everybody in fact we know he did he showed it to Isaiah and he said look here the king of Babylon boy he's my friend I didn't know he was my friend before but look at it he says he's glad I got well and as a result Hezekiah did not think that he needed to take that letter and spread it before the Lord.

You know he didn't think that he needed to pray about that letter at all and as a result he didn't pray about it. May I say to you this morning that that letter was more dangerous than the other letter this was a poison pen letter this is the most dangerous letter that he could have gotten oh how he was flattered that a king like the king of Babylon from a far country would inquire after his health that just something wasn't heard of he said look here see that postmark? Babylon see that letter?

King King down there sent that to me and he says he's sure glad I got well isn't that wonderful? Wonderful to have a friend like that isn't it?

May I say to you that that sort of thing wasn't the best thing in the world for him let me read now 2nd Kings 20th chapter 12th verse listen carefully that time Baradoc Baaladon the son of Baaladon king of Babylon sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick and Hezekiah

hearkened unto them showed them all the house of his precious things the silver and the gold and the spices and the precious ointment and all the house of his armor and all that was found in his treasures there was nothing in his house nor in all his dominion Hezekiah showed them not now Hezekiah wanted to show his appreciation to these ambassadors that had made this long wearisome trip from Babylon and so he gave them a personally conducted tour of the treasury department of his

kingdom and even took them down and let them see into Fort Knox and he had quite an assortment of wealth to show them it's interesting what Chronicles has to say concerning this will you listen to this language in 2nd Chronicles the 32nd chapter and Hezekiah had exceeding much riches and honor he made himself treasures for silver for gold for precious stones for spices for shields for all manner of pleasant jewels storehouses also for the increase of corn and wine and oil and stalls for all manner of beasts and coats for flocks why he became a very wealthy man because Hezekiah is a man who returned to God and God had promised to bless his people materially when they returned to him and God made good to this man so he had an abundance of wealth and he showed that to the ambassadors believe

me he put on an entertainment for them and I use the common parlance of the day but they went home bug eyed they had never seen anything like that in their lives they didn't know there was that much wealth in the world of that day for Babylon at this time was a poor little kingdom and hadn't quite got started down the road to power and when word was brought to Isaiah as to what had happened Isaiah immediately came into the presence of this man Hezekiah and he made inquiry will you listen to this and I have to turn now to Isaiah's record of it and then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah and said unto him what said these men and from whence came they unto thee and Hezekiah said there come from a far country unto me even from Babylon then said he what have they seen in thine house

and Hezekiah answered all that's in mine house have they seen there is nothing among my treasures that I have not showed them I've let them see it all Isaiah sent the danger now will you listen to him then said Isaiah to Hezekiah hear the word of the Lord of hosts behold the days come that all that's in thine house and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day shall be carried to Babylon nothing shall be left saith the Lord Isaiah said don't you know you did foolishly that this kingdom is beginning to move to the front and they need money they need wealth they need gold don't you know that that record will be put down yonder on the books in Babylon and the day will come there will arise a king in Babylon that will make war and he'll want to know where the wealth is and

there will come forth scribes and say it's written down here that about a hundred years ago some of the ambassadors who went yonder to Jerusalem saw a fabulous amount of gold unbelievable it was and if you need gold you go to Jerusalem and that's exactly what Nebuchadnezzar later on did and he laid siege around the city of Jerusalem until he took it and he carried away everything that was gold even the vessels of the temple were taken down there where Belshazzar blasphemed concerning them all because Hezekiah received a flattering letter and instead of laying that before the Lord and making it a matter of prayer he acted on his own and he was flattered beyond words now my beloved we have the explanation of why God permitted this if you turn over to 2nd Chronicles the 32nd chapter the 31st

verse you'll get God's viewpoint now and you'll see what was back of this will you listen to this very carefully how be it in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon who sent unto him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land God left him to try him that he might know all that was in his heart you know the reason God permitted this man to have this experience at this particular time well it was just simply this Hezekiah was a good man he is recorded as the best king after David but after all he's

just a man and no one was ever exalted quite like he was this man let pride enter into his heart we get the suggestion of that back in verse 25 but Hezekiah rendered not a gain according to the benefit done unto him for his heart was lifted up therefore was wrath upon

him and upon Judah and Jerusalem and so we begin to see the little speck in the apple now we begin to see why God permitted this to take place because this man Hezekiah has been lifted up in pride this man Hezekiah well he says look what a big fellow I am what a kingdom I have and after all when a king a personal friend of mine sends me a letter and tells me he's glad I got well I don't need to pray about that my beloved you and I today are more susceptible to flattery than we are to fear we had the four freedoms given to us in World War II they've never come to fruition yet but they were promised but in the four freedoms there should have been a fifth freedom from flattery you know many of us today can resist an enemy but we can't resist a friend we cannot resist flattery did you know

that the Lord Jesus was tested at this particular point probably as in no other way it was at the end of His ministry and we are told that at this particular time the enemy came in the most subtle way that he could come to Him in Luke 20 20 I read they watched Him they sent forth spies which should feign themselves just men that they might take hold of His words that so they might deliver Him under the power and authority of the governor some of these clever smart scribes they laid aside their garments and the badge of their office dressed like everyday folk joined the crowd and they listened to Jesus that they might take Him and they asked Him saying Master we know that Thou sayest and teachest rightly neither acceptest Thou the person of any but teachest the way of God truly oh boy were

they flattering Him do you know what He said to them ye hypocrite that's what He called them may I say that flattery is something that you and I somehow or another are not able to overcome at all I have not yet learned what to say to flattery I know how to meet opposition if I be right I'll stand on what I believe is right and God will defend me but I don't know what to say when it's obvious it's flattery oh they have loved flattery it was His undoing He only gathered around Him men who would flatter Him and they told Him wrong oh today how that ministers to our pride how today that's the undoing of men today the story is told of the stag that was in the depths of the forest and there was a limpid pool and the stag was drinking after the stag finished drinking the stag looked down in the

pool and saw its lovely antlers beautiful they were the stag looked down there and admired those antlers they were so beautiful then he saw in the water the reflection of his scrawny knotty muscle legs and he was ashamed of them about that time there was the sound of the hounds in the distance and the stag knew he must move and he started running through the woods and those legs of which he was ashamed they were taking him speedily away but those antlers that so flattered him caught in the limb of a tree and he was hanging there when the hounds got to tear him to pieces oh today how many of us are flattered and that's one of the reasons today that multitudes are not saved they want to do it themselves the story is told of Andrew Carnegie the man who founded so many of our libraries he was

a Scotchman who came to this country as a as a boy from Scotland and he made good in steel he became immensely wealthy he was an agnostic he went back to Scotland to his hometown and they tendered him a banquet and at the banquet that night he got up and in his boastful way he says after he told his hometown's folk of what he had accumulated and what he was worth in America today he says what is it that God could give me that I have not gotten for myself an old weasel Scotchman sitting over in the corner a real man of God he said well Andy he could have given you a little humility that's what Andrew Carnegie needed you can't buy it his millions couldn't buy him a little humility my beloved flattery today

keeps us from seeing ourselves as we really are God wanted Hezekiah to see his own

heart so God in this matter withdrew from Hezekiah and let this man who had been so mightily blessed of God even this man see himself as he really is because my beloved that's the only way you and I can ever see ourselves Jeremiah said the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked who can know it I the Lord search the heart I try the reins even to give every man according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings the Lord Jesus says out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies and the Lord Jesus didn't find anything good in the human heart apart from God do you know that today?

Hezekiah learned that hard hearts and stiff necks are keeping more men from Christ today than anything else Paul says that in the last days the time will come when they'll not endure sound doctrine but after their own lust shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears and they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables you know why? we've had folk here, oh how God's blessed us here but we've had folk leave us here you know why? they don't want to hear the truth they want to be flattered they want to be told that they are not sinners they say we want to be comforted my beloved when you're wrong with God and you can see your heart as it really is you need to know that you need the cleansing power from above and you have nothing within yourself but you and I my beloved have a heart this morning that is filthy beyond measure it's not fit for heaven and until you and I are willing to bow and come to him and acknowledge our guilt and acknowledge our need we can never be saved my brother, my sister this morning it's up to you are you going to try to come to God in your own pride? aren't you willing to bow your neck and accept what he has to offer? are you going to continue to walk this earth strutting like a peacock bragging of yourself when this morning you need his cleansing blood? that's what you and I need today do you find that you are in need of a savior? have you come to the realization that you can no longer hold on to the hope that your good works will get you to heaven? well, if you'd like to know more about God's plan of salvation and how you can experience it for yourself then we'd like to send you some helpful information simply call us anytime at 1-800-65-BIBLE and leave your voicemail request for the salvation packet and when you do call be sure to include your name, address and the call letters of this station now today's sermon, two letters, two replies, two results is available on cassette tape for those who are interested in having their own copy for ordering information you may contact one of our helpful service operators at 1-800-652-4253 Monday through Friday from 6 a.m. to 4 p.m.

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