

Review

In our last study, we saw Hezekiah's response to the threats of invasion and slaughter by Assyria's King Sennacherib. Seeing that his nation's destruction was at hand, he sought the Lord in prayer.

Tonight, we will see how Hezekiah responds to news that is just as fatal, but even more personal...

38:1 Set Your House In Order

After the threat of invasion by Assyria was over, you would expect things to return to normal. But like life often does to us, Hezekiah's trial was immediately followed by another one: he became deathly sick.

The prophet Isaiah came to the king and told him that he was in fact going to die. This wasn't just for information purposes. It was so that Hezekiah would "set his house in order."

When we think of setting our houses in order, our first thoughts are primarily financial: You make sure your will is up to date, you give key people your life insurance information, transferral of retirement benefits, etc.

Then, many people begin to think beyond the financial and get into the relational. "Have I told the people I love how I feel about them? Have I communicated everything so that there won't be any regrets?"

Unfortunately, what is often not on people's lists is the spiritual. Spiritually speaking, is your house in order? Have you left the proper information with your loved ones? Have you said everything that needs to be said, with no regrets? Are you prepared to meet your Maker?

Hezekiah wasn't ready. That's why Isaiah was sent by the Lord to tell him to set his house in order.

38:2-3 Hezekiah Wept Bitterly

Hezekiah was saying, "Please let me live longer, after all, look how good I've been!" Does a good life always warrant a long life? What about when a righteous person dies "early" in life? Should we be confused by that? Does anybody actually die early? I don't believe so. The Word of God tells us that the Lord has already set each person's lifespan:

Job 14:5 "...his days are determined, the number of his months is with You..."

Some people don't have as many days as others, and we don't know why the Lord chooses that number. But He does. And in Hezekiah's life, like in each of ours, God knew what He was doing.

In this case, I think we're given a clue. The book of 2Chronicles tells us that after the victory over Assyria,

2Chr. 32:23-24 And many were bringing gifts to the LORD at Jerusalem and choice presents to Hezekiah king of Judah, so that he was exalted in the sight of all nations thereafter. In those days Hezekiah became mortally ill...

It would seem that Hezekiah's good life was going to be short for the very reason that it was good. If he continued to get all of this recognition and attention, it is very likely that he would have fallen into pride.

But instead of being content with God's decision, Hezekiah tried to convince God that he deserved a longer life than this.

38:4-6 I Will Add Fifteen Years

The writer of Kings gives us a little more detail than Isaiah does:

2Kings 20:4-6 Before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "Return and say to Hezekiah the leader of My people, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of your father David, "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD. I will add fifteen years to your life, and I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake and for My servant David's sake.'"

Isaiah hadn't even left Hezekiah's house before God told him to turn around and tell the king that his life was going to be extended for 15 years.

This enters into a dynamic of man's prayer and God's will that I don't think we will ever fully understand. You see, Hezekiah's life was

spared because he prayed. And yet, this was not God's ideal for Hezekiah. As we're going to see, he would have been much better off if he had died when he was supposed to. And yet, it's clear that this extension was also not a curse on Hezekiah for whining. In fact, the life extension was a benefit.

2Chr. 32:25 But Hezekiah gave no return for the benefit he received, because his heart was proud...

So the extension was a blessing, but because of Hezekiah's pride, it turned out to be a curse, which of course God knew would happen all along. Confused yet? If not, you're not thinking hard enough about it!

Have you wrestled with the issues of man's prayer and God's plans? It's something that we all should do. Not that we'll come up with any definitive answers, but it challenges our faith to grow and expand with every Bible verse we read about it.

So what can we conclude from all of this? Your guess is probably as good as mine. But what it ministers to me today is that we should whine less and seek contentment more. We should reach the point of maturity that the apostle Paul did, when he said...

Phil. 4:11-13 ...I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

Hezekiah wasn't content with God's original plan, and pressed for something different. He ended up getting what he asked for, but also suffered the consequences of being outside of God's will.

One of my greatest fears is that I will press the Lord in prayer for something He doesn't want for me. May the cry of our hearts be,

Luke 22:42 "...yet not My will, but Yours be done."

38:7-8 The Sun's Shadow Went Back

From reading the parallel passage in 2Kings 20, we find out that

Hezekiah's terrible illness wasn't cured right away. It was going to be a few days before he felt good enough to get up. But as reassurance, God gave him a sign that the sun would move backwards in the sky.

Although this account is completely and historically true, there is an urban legend that continues to circulate through Christian circles. As the story goes, NASA scientists were running computer simulations of orbital mechanics to check the position of the sun, moon, and planets 100 years from now and 1,000 years from now in order to plot spacecraft trajectories and future satellite missions. As they ran their computers up and down the centuries, the computer kept crashing because they calculated that we were a day off.

Then, one of the men remembered a Sunday School lesson about an event in Joshua 10. Joshua was leading the Israelites in a fight against five kings. Joshua prayed,

Josh. 10:12-13 ..."O sun, stand still at Gibeon, And O moon in the valley of Ah-yaw-LONE." So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, Until the nation avenged themselves of their enemies. Is it not written in the book of Yaw-SHAWR? And the sun stopped in the middle of the sky, and did not hasten to go {down} for about a whole day.

The legend continues that when the NASA scientists plugged in the numbers, they got very close to reconciling the positions of all the planets. But they were only able to account for 23 hours and 20 minutes. What had happened to the other 40 minutes?

Fortunately, this same man remembered this story. They ran the calculations of the steps in degrees and discovered that the missing 40 minutes fit exactly! The Bible had saved the space program!

Of course, this has been proven time and again by secular and Christian sources to be pure fiction. Even without asking NASA (and they have been asked LOTS of times), the holes in the story are plentiful and obvious. If it gets sent to you, delete it. Certainly don't forward it.

38:9-20 After Hezekiah's Recovery

King Hezekiah wrote these verses down after he recovered from his

illness. It is a bit difficult that Isaiah placed them before verses 21 and 22, since chronologically it comes after. But the writing he wrote afterwards talks about what he experienced during those minutes after he got the news, so I probably would have placed them between verses four and five. But since nobody asked me, I'm sure they're right where they belong!

In this writing, you can see all of Hezekiah's mistaken ideas and bad theology, even while having faith in God.

38:21-22 Before Hezekiah's Healing

In these verses, we see that Isaiah gave instructions to heal Hezekiah. We're also made aware of the unpleasant fact that the sickness, whatever it might have been, had manifested in a boil.

39:1-8 Hezekiah Gives A Tour

Remember that Hezekiah had become quite the prominent politician since the defeat of Sennacherib at Jerusalem (2Chron. 32:23). When news spread that he had been very sick, the son of the king of Babylon, **Mer-o-DAK Bal-aw-DAWN**, sent him glad-you-got-well-soon cards and a gift.

Hezekiah was pretty impressed with himself, having made connections with such an important world-wide figure. After all, Babylon was becoming quite a powerful empire itself. It could one day even overshadow the Assyrians in greatness.

He wanted to show that he was on the same level as this prince of Babylon - to make sure that the messengers came back with stories about how rich and powerful this king of Judah was. So he took them on a tour of the treasure house. He showed them everything in his dominion that he thought would impress them.

This reminds me of an incident when I was in 5th grade. Being a little kid in our apartment complex, I was always looking to find a connection to the older kids' circle. I wanted to hang out with the "cool" guys. One Saturday, I managed to start a conversation with one of these big kids - a junior high schooler! When I showed him the pinball machine

I had in my room, that did it! By that afternoon, I had a bunch of older kids hanging out in my room - coming in and out through the window! I thought I'd really arrived.

Imagine my shock when, a few days later, my mom drove us home from Day Care one evening to find my window screen removed and my window open. My coin bank was broken open and lay empty. Also stolen had been my mother's coin jars, a camera my sisters and I had bought for her, and her wedding ring.

At that early age, I had learned the lesson that Hezekiah apparently never did, or at least had forgotten in his pride.

Isaiah came and informed him that because he had done this,

Is. 39:6 'Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house and all that your fathers have laid up in store to this day will be carried to Babylon; nothing will be left,' says the LORD.

They would be taken to Babylon, along with the rest of his people, because of his proud heart (2Chron. 32:25).

There's a lot of "ifs" in this story:

- If Hezekiah had died when he was supposed to...
- If Hezekiah had humbled himself...
- If Hezekiah hadn't been trying to fit in with the big boys...

I don't want my life to be full of "if" regrets, and I don't think you do either. So let's humble ourselves before the Lord and submit to His plans for us.