

Hezekiah

As one looks at the list of Kings that ruled over Judah, some were called good/right and others were evil. Yet the majority of the good kings were half-hearted in their service to God. The two kings that stood above all the others were Hezekiah and Josiah. Both were very zealous in their reforms to undo the evil their fathers had done. Both began their reign after serious damage to God's temple and worship.

They are both powerful illustrations of how God's word can overcome the worst of evil influences, even within the family itself. These two kings perfectly illustrate Ezekiel's examples of wicked fathers bearing good sons (Ezek. 18).

Hezekiah's upbringing must have been very difficult. His father Ahaz was twenty when he began to reign and only reigned sixteen years. Since Hezekiah was twenty-five, when he began his reign, he was about 9 years old when his father took the throne. More than that since his father was twenty when he began to reign, he was only eleven when Hezekiah was born and only thirty-six when he died.

*In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, Ahaz the son of Jotham, king of Judah, began to reign. 2 **Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; and he did not do what was right in the sight of the LORD his God, as his father David had done. 2Kng. 16:1-2***

*Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea the son of Elah, king of Israel, that **Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign. 2 He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. 2Kng. 18:1-2***

From 9 years old until his 25th year, he watched his father, Ahaz reign

Perhaps his grandfather Jotham had taken an interest in him and for, as a good king *he "became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the LORD his God. (2Chr. 27:6)*. But this is only speculation.

What we do know that from the age of nine, he witnessed the type of man and king his father became.

*3 **he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made molded images for the Baals. 3 He burned incense in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, and burned his children in the fire,**
4 he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree.
22 Now **in the time of his distress King Ahaz became increasingly unfaithful to the LORD .**
24 Ahaz **gathered the articles of the house of God, cut in pieces the articles of the house of God, shut up the doors of the house of the LORD , and made for himself altars in every corner of Jerusalem. 2Chr 28***

He also witnessed the great upheaval his father's wicked ways brought upon Judah.

*5 Therefore the LORD his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria. They defeated him, and **carried away a great multitude of them as captives, and brought them to Damascus.***

*he was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, **who defeated him with a great slaughter.**
... 6 Pekah the son of Remaliah **killed one hundred and twenty thousand in Judah in one day, all valiant men, because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers.***

*8 **And the children of Israel carried away captive of their brethren two hundred thousand women, sons, and daughters; and they also took away much spoil from them.***

a prophet of the LORD was there, whose name was Oded; and he went out before the army ... 11 Now hear me, therefore, and return the captives, whom you have taken captive from your brethren, for the fierce wrath of the LORD is upon you."

18 the Edomites had come, attacked Judah, and carried away captives. The Philistines also had invaded the cities of the lowland and of the South of Judah, 19 For the LORD brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had encouraged moral decline in Judah and had been continually unfaithful to the LORD. Ahaz sent to the kings of Assyria to help him. Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came to him and distressed him, and did not assist him. 2Chr. 28

Out of these circumstances came one of the greatest kings of Judah!

Hezekiah Began His Reign

Judah was very low when he took the throne and Israel was only six years from complete removal from their land. Assyria was a constant threat, and all the nations around Judah were emboldened to take whatever cities they wanted.

In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria, and placed them in Halah and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. 2Kng. 17:6

Hezekiah must have been a true breath of fresh air to the oppressed righteous in Judah. In the first month of his reign, he restored the temple and began true worship to the LORD.

In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the LORD and repaired them. 4 Then he brought in the priests and the Levites, and gathered them in the East Square, 5 and said to them: "Hear me, Levites! Now sanctify yourselves, sanctify the house of the LORD God of your fathers, and carry out the rubbish from the holy place. 2Chr. 29:3-6

As noted above, Hezekiah had witnessed all the terrible things done by his father and the righteous retribution God had poured out on Judah.

For our fathers have trespassed and done evil in the eyes of the LORD our God; they have forsaken Him, have turned their faces away from the dwelling place of the LORD, and turned their backs on Him. ... 8 Therefore the wrath of the LORD fell upon Judah and Jerusalem, and He has given them up to trouble, to desolation, and to jeering, as you see with your eyes. 9 For indeed, because of this our fathers have fallen by the sword; and our sons, our daughters, and our wives are in captivity. 2Chr. 29:6, 8-9

The first thing he wanted to do was make a covenant with God and restore Judah to Him. The first thing he does is gather the Levites with instructions to cleanse the temple

"Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the LORD God of Israel, that His fierce wrath may turn away from us. 11 My sons, do not be negligent now, for the LORD has chosen you to stand before Him, to serve Him, and that you should minister to Him and burn incense." 2Chr. 29:10-11

And they gathered their brethren, sanctified themselves, and went according to the commandment of the king, at the words of the LORD, to cleanse the house of the LORD. 2Chr. 29:15-16

The priests were also involved, entering into the temple and cleaning out all the debris.

Then the priests went into the inner part of the house of the LORD to cleanse it, and brought out all the debris that they found in the temple of the LORD to the court of the house of the LORD. And the Levites took it out and carried it to the Brook Kidron. 2Chr. 29:16

It took eight days to completely remove all the trash and then another eight days to completely sanctify and prepare the temple for service to the LORD.

Now they began to sanctify on the first day of the first month, and on the eighth day of the month they came to the vestibule of the LORD. So they sanctified the house of the LORD in eight days, and on the sixteenth day of the first month they finished. 18 Then they went in to King Hezekiah and said, "We have cleansed all the house of the LORD, the altar of burnt offerings with all its articles, and the table of the showbread with all its articles. 19 Moreover all the articles which King Ahaz in his reign had cast aside in his transgression we have prepared and sanctified; and there they are, before the altar of the LORD." 2Chr. 29:17-20

There are two possibilities of the meaning of "first day of the first month." The most obvious would be the "first day of the first month" of his reign over Judah. If that be the case, then it would have

been in the beginning of the next year that the events describing the Passover occurred.

Yet it is also possible that his reign started with the new year of the Jewish calendar. If that be its meaning, then it was three days after the Passover should have been observed when Hezekiah gathered Judah together.

Hezekiah Restored God's Temple, Israel, and Worship to the LORD

Immediately after the temple was cleansed and prepared, Hezekiah called Judah's leaders to the temple and step by step followed God's words. He first had the altar cleansed and prepared for use.

*Then King Hezekiah rose early, gathered the rulers of the city, and went up to the house of the LORD. 21 And they brought seven bulls, seven rams, seven lambs, and seven male goats for a **sin offering for the kingdom, for the sanctuary, and for Judah**. Then he commanded the priests, the sons of Aaron, to offer them on the altar of the LORD. 22 So they **killed the bulls, and the priests received the blood and sprinkled it on the altar**. Likewise **they killed the rams and sprinkled the blood on the altar**. They also **killed the lambs and sprinkled the blood on the altar**. 2Chr. 29:20-22*

After the altar, an offering male goats were made for the leaders(including the king) who laid their hands on the goat as the Law of Moses required. Yet Hezekiah went much further than just Judah, He wanted to atonement made for all Israel and not just Judah alone.

*Then they brought out the male goats for the sin offering before the king and the assembly, and they laid their hands on them. 24 And the priests killed them; and they presented their blood on the altar **as a sin offering to make an atonement for all Israel, for the king commanded that the burnt offering and the sin offering be made for all Israel**. 2Chr. 29:23-24*

After all was atoned and made holy, Hezekiah began to restore the actual worship to God.

And he stationed the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, with stringed instruments, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for thus was the commandment of the LORD by His prophets. ... 27 Then Hezekiah commanded them to offer the burnt offering on the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of the LORD also began, with the trumpets and with the instruments of David king of Israel. 28 So all the assembly worshiped, the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded; all this continued until the burnt offering was finished. 29 And when they had finished offering, the king and all who were present with him bowed and worshiped. 2Chron. 29:26, 27-30

At the end of these events, Hezekiah pronounced them consecrated and gave them the opportunity to show their devotion to God.

Then Hezekiah answered and said, "Now that you have consecrated yourselves to the LORD, come near, and bring sacrifices and thank offerings into the house of the LORD." So the assembly brought in sacrifices and thank offerings, and as many as were of a willing heart brought burnt offerings. ... 35 So the service of the house of the LORD was set in order. 36 Then Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced that God had prepared the people, since the events took place so suddenly. 2Chr. 29:31, 35-36

The only flaw in the entire plan came from the priests, who had not properly prepared themselves.

But the priests were too few, so that they could not skin all the burnt offerings; therefore their brethren the Levites helped them until the work was ended and until the other priests had sanctified themselves, for the Levites were more diligent in sanctifying themselves than the priests. 2Chr. 29:34-35

Hezekiah Prepares to Restore the Passover

Although the prescribed day for the Passover had passed, Hezekiah relied on a passage that gave them a second opportunity.

On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the LORD's Passover. 6 And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. Lev. 23:5-6

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 10 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'If anyone of you

or your posterity is unclean because of a corpse, or is far away on a journey, he may still keep the LORD'S Passover. 11 On the fourteenth day of the second month, at twilight, they may keep it. They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ...13 But the man who is clean and is not on a journey, and ceases to keep the Passover, that same person shall be cut off from among his people, because he did not bring the offering of the LORD at its appointed time; that man shall bear his sin. Num 9:9-11, 13

So Hezekiah used this opportunity to gather the entire nation of Judah along with all in Israel who would also like to participate.

And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and also wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, to keep the Passover to the LORD God of Israel. 2 For the king and his leaders and all the assembly in Jerusalem had agreed to keep the Passover in the second month. 3 For they could not keep it at the regular time, because a sufficient number of priests had not consecrated themselves, nor had the people gathered together at Jerusalem. 4 And the matter pleased the king and all the assembly. 5 So they resolved to make a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, that they should come to keep the Passover to the LORD God of Israel at Jerusalem, since they had not done it for a long time in the prescribed manner. 2Chr. 30:1-5

Hezekiah sent "runners" who like heralds or preachers went from city to city to proclaim the opportunity for them to return to Jerusalem, the temple and the Worship of Jehovah.

Then the runners went throughout all Israel and Judah with the letters from the king and his leaders, and spoke according to the command of the king: "Children of Israel, return to the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel; then He will return to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria. 7 And do not be like your fathers and your brethren, who trespassed against the LORD God of their fathers, so that He gave them up to desolation, as you see. 2Chr. 30:6-8

For if you return to the LORD, your brethren and your children will be treated with compassion by those who lead them captive, so that they may come back to this land; for the LORD your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn His face from you if you return to Him." 2Chr. 30:9

So the runners passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, as far as Zebulun; but they laughed at them and mocked them. 11 Nevertheless some from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. 12 Also the hand of God was on Judah to give them singleness of heart to obey the command of the king and the leaders, at the word of the LORD. 2Chr. 30:10-12

Not everyone who arrived at Jerusalem had properly prepared themselves. They were unprepared, but wanted to participate. Hezekiah interceded for them, and God heard that prayer.

For a multitude of the people, many from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet they ate the Passover contrary to what was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "May the good Lord provide atonement for everyone 19 who prepares his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he is not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary." 20 And the LORD listened to Hezekiah and healed the people. 2Chr. 30:18-20

As the account ends, a summary of the events and the good it accomplished

So the children of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with great gladness; and the Levites and the priests praised the LORD day by day, singing to the LORD, accompanied by loud instruments. 22 And Hezekiah gave encouragement to all the Levites who taught the good knowledge of the LORD; and they ate throughout the feast seven days, offering peace offerings and making confession to the LORD God of their fathers. 2Chr. 30:21-22

The whole assembly of Judah rejoiced, also the priests and Levites, all the assembly that came from Israel, the sojourners who came from the land of Israel, and those who dwelt in Judah. 26 So there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel, there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem. 27 Then the priests, the Levites, arose and blessed the people, and their voice was heard; and their prayer came up to His holy dwelling place, to

heaven. 2Chr. 30:25-27

The Ideals of Reform Captured the Hearts of the People

With the feast of unleavened bread, the Passover and the continuation of the festivities for another full week, the people of Israel were deeply moved and took it upon themselves to continue what Hezekiah had started

Now when all this was finished, all Israel who were present went out to the cities of Judah and broke the sacred pillars in pieces, cut down the wooden images, and threw down the high places and the altars — from all Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh — until they had utterly destroyed them all. Then all the children of Israel returned to their own cities, every man to his possession. 2Chr. 31:1

Hezekiah also Continued the Restoration

Hezekiah also continued his efforts to bring Judah back into complete submission to God and to the Law of Moses. He first restored all the work of the Priests and Levites to the level it ought to be and then commanded those in Jerusalem to restore the tithe and other offerings so the priests could do this work and so God would be glorified by their obedience.

Not only did Hezekiah put his efforts into making the people submissive, but also used his own resources to reinstate all that he could to what God wanted it to be.

*And Hezekiah **appointed the divisions of the priests and the Levites** according to their divisions, each man according to his service, the priests and Levites **for burnt offerings and peace offerings, to serve, to give thanks, and to praise in the gates of the camp of the LORD.** 3 **The king also appointed a portion of his possessions for the burnt offerings:** for the morning and evening burnt offerings, the burnt offerings for the **Sabbaths** and the **New Moons** and the **set feasts, as it is written in the Law of the LORD.** 2Chr. 31:2-3*

After showing his own example, he commanded all those in Jerusalem to join with him in serving God with all their heart. Clearly the people were still deeply moved by all they had seen and immediately followed his example and command. What is equally exciting is that though the command was given to those who dwell in Jerusalem, even those from Israel and Judah who had come to the Passover were also submissive to the command.

*Moreover **he commanded the people who dwelt in Jerusalem to contribute support for the priests and the Levites, that they might devote themselves to the Law of the LORD.** 5 **As soon as the commandment was circulated, the children of Israel brought in abundance the firstfruits of grain and wine, oil and honey, and of all the produce of the field; and they brought in abundantly the tithe of everything.** 6 **And the children of Israel and Judah, who dwelt in the cities of Judah, brought the tithe of oxen and sheep; also the tithe of holy things which were consecrated to the LORD their God they laid in heaps.** 2Chr. 31:4-6*

The response was overwhelming and not only did everyone get what they needed, but the rest of it was heaped up causing Hezekiah to come and question them about it. Their answer must have been very deeply satisfying to him.

Then Hezekiah questioned the priests and the Levites concerning the heaps. 10 And Azariah the chief priest, from the house of Zadok, answered him and said, “Since the people began to bring the offerings into the house of the LORD, we have had enough to eat and have plenty left, for the Lord has blessed His people; and what is left is this great abundance.” 2Chr. 31:9-10

As God sums up his service to Him, it is with the highest of honor and praise.

***Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah, and he did what was good and right and true before the LORD his God.** 21 **And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, in the law and in the commandment, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart. So he prospered.** 2Chr. 31:20-21*

All of this is condensed into a short paragraph of the first fourteen years of his reign.

He removed the high places and broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan. 5 He trusted in the LORD God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him. 6 For he held fast to the Lord; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the Lord had commanded Moses. 7 The Lord was with him; he prospered wherever he went. 2K. 18:4-6

The World of Hezekiah's Day

While Chronicles goes into the great details of the restoration, the account of his life in the book of Second Kings takes a more historical perspective. Weaving into His life the great events that were occurring that would clearly have a great impact upon him.

Israel(10 Tribes) Removed

There is nothing more motivating to a servant of God than to see the terrible consequences of those who are not doing what God has commanded. While we read about them in the Scriptures and are told to take them to heart(1Cor. 10; 2Pet. 2; Heb. 3-4), Hezekiah lived to see it.

Now it came to pass in the fourth year of King Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of Hoshea the son of Elah, king of Israel, that Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against Samaria and besieged it. 10 And at the end of three years they took it. In the sixth year of Hezekiah, that is, the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel, Samaria was taken. 11 Then the king of Assyria carried Israel away captive to Assyria, and put them in Halah and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes, 12 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; and they would neither hear nor do them. 2Kng. 18:9-12

In his fourth year, Assyria beseiged Samaria and in the sixth year, Israel fell and was removed. Judah now stands alone.

Eight Years Later in the Fourteenth year of His Reign Assyria Comes for Judah

Early in his reign(in the fourth year), Hezekiah had rebelled against Assyria.

The LORD was with him; he prospered wherever he went. And he rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him. 8 He subdued the Philistines, as far as Gaza and its territory, from watchtower to fortified city. 9 Now it came to pass in the fourth year of King Hezekiah 2K. 18:7-9

But in the fourteenth year, when Assyria came, Hezekiah humbled himself before them and sought for peace. There is no indication of a lack of faith here. It seems he was a humble man who sought for peace. The king assessed a penalty to Hezekiah and he paid it.

And in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them. 14 Then Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachis h, saying, "I have done wrong; turn away from me; whatever you impose on me I will pay." And the king of Assyria assessed Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. 2Kng. 18:13-15

Assyria Seeks to Destroy Jerusalem.

In the midst of Hezekiah's faithful service, in the fourteenth year of his reign, at the age of 39(1Kgs. 18:13), Assyria's king surrounded Jerusalem with over 185,000 men. Having already conquered the ten tribes of Israel, he believed it would be a simple matter to take Judah.

These events are recorded in Isaiah 36-39, 1Kings 18:17-20:21 and 2Chronicles 32. Isaiah has the most detailed account, with Kings and Chronicles giving fewer details. Yet each offers some detail that the other passes over.

Chronicles sums up the events leading into the conflict. It is evident that they had a lot of time to prepare since they were able to stop up the springs, build up the wall, and make weapons and shields. These preparations, and Hezekiah's words of encouragement did much strengthen and encourage them.

1 After these deeds of faithfulness, Sennacherib king of Assyria came and entered Judah; he encamped against the fortified cities, thinking to win them over to himself. 2 And when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come, and that his purpose was to make war against Jerusalem, 3 he consulted with his leaders and commanders to stop the water from the springs which were outside the city; and they helped him.

5 And he strengthened himself, built up all the wall that was broken, raised it up to the towers, and built another wall outside; also he repaired the Millo in the City of David, and made weapons and shields in abundance. 6 Then he set military captains over the people, gathered them together to him in the open square of the city gate, and gave them encouragement,

7 Be strong and courageous; do not be afraid nor dismayed before the king of Assyria, nor before all the multitude that is with him; for there are more with us than with him. 8 With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles.” And the people were strengthened by the words of Hezekiah king of Judah. 2Chr. 32:1-8

Hezekiah - 2

Review:

Hezekiah had spent his entire reign restoring God's Law and service in Judah. He was a good and faithful king. In the fifteenth year of his reign, Assyria sent a large army to take Jerusalem.

Assyria arrives at Jerusalem

When the army arrived at Jerusalem, there were more than 185,000 men. These men struck great fear and dread into the hearts of those in Jerusalem.

Then the king of Assyria sent the Rabshakeh with a great army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. And he stood by the aqueduct from the upper pool, on the highway to the Fuller's Field. Isa 36:2-3

*And it came to pass on a certain night that the angel of the LORD went out, and **killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand**; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses — all dead. 2Kng. 19:35-36*

But more than their presence were the words spoken to all the people in the Hebrew language, that put into plain view the great disadvantages of Jerusalem.

*Then the Rabshakeh said to them, "Say now to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: **What confidence is this in which you trust? 5 I say you speak of having plans and power for war; but they are mere words.** Now in whom do you trust, that you rebel against me? 6 Look! You are trusting in the staff of this broken reed, Egypt, on which if a man leans, it will go into his hand and pierce it. So is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him. 7 **But if you say to me, 'We trust in the LORD our God,' is it not He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has taken away, and said to Judah and Jerusalem, 'You shall worship before this altar?'**" Isa 36:4-8*

He also scoffed at their pitiful preparations and blasphemed God.

*Now therefore, I urge you, give a pledge to my master the king of Assyria, and **I will give you two thousand horses — if you are able on your part to put riders on them! 9 How then will you repel one captain of the least of my master's servants,** and put your trust in Egypt for chariots and horsemen? 10 **Have I now come up without the LORD against this land to destroy it? The LORD said to me, 'Go up against this land, and destroy it.'**" Isa 36:8-10*

The ambassadors pleaded with him to speak in the language of the Assyrians, but he scoffed. Then makes a direct appeal to the people, hurling insults and again speaking words of blasphemy.

*Then Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah said to the Rabshakeh, "**Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand it; and do not speak to us in Hebrew in the hearing of the people who are on the wall.**" 12 But the Rabshakeh said, "**Has my master sent me to your master and to you to speak these words, and not to the men who sit on the wall, who will eat and drink their own waste with you?**" 13 Then the Rabshakeh stood and called out with a loud voice in Hebrew, and said, "Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria! 14 Thus says the king: **'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you; 15 nor let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord, saying, 'The Lord will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.'**" Isa 36:11-12*

***Beware lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, "The Lord will deliver us." Has any one of the gods of the nations delivered its land from the hand of the king of Assyria? 19 Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Indeed, have they delivered Samaria from my hand? 20 Who among all the gods of these lands have delivered their countries from my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem from my hand?"**" Isa 36:18-20*

Hezekiah's Response

Assyria has given Hezekiah three choices. He can find enough men to do battle against Assyria, he can surrender the city, or he can prepare for a siege. Assyria had written a letter and he spreads that letter before the LORD in the temple. Hezekiah first tore his clothes in his anguish, then

covered himself in sackcloth.

And so it was, when King Hezekiah heard it, that he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD. Isa. 37:1

These were two methods were often used in Israel. We first read of tearing clothes when Judah did not find Joseph in the pit and of sackcloth when Jacob thought Joseph was dead.

*Then Reuben returned to the pit, and indeed Joseph was not in the pit; and **he tore his clothes**. 30 And he returned to his brothers and said, “The lad is no more; and I, where shall I go?” Gen. 37:29-30*

*And he recognized it and said, “It is my son’s tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces.” 34 Then **Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist**, and mourned for his son many days. Gen 37:33-35*

Among its final uses is the High Priest at Jesus trial and Paul and Barnabas when they heard those in Iconium were about to offer sacrifice to them.

*But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, **they tore their clothes** and ran in among the multitude, crying out 15 and saying, “Men, why are you doing these things? Acts 14:14-15*

*Then the high priest **tore his clothes**, saying, “He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy! Mt. 26:65-66*

Assyria had written a letter and he spread that letter before the LORD in the temple.

***He also wrote letters to revile the LORD God of Israel, and to speak against Him**, saying, “As the gods of the nations of other lands have not delivered their people from my hand, so the God of Hezekiah will not deliver His people from my hand.” 18 Then they called out with a loud voice in Hebrew to the people of Jerusalem who were on the wall, to frighten them and trouble them, that they might take the city. 19 And they spoke against the God of Jerusalem, as against the gods of the people of the earth — the work of men’s hands. 2Chr. 32:17-19*

*And **Hezekiah received the letter** from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord, **and spread it before the LORD**. 2Kng. 19:14*

Hezekiah then sent a message to Isaiah, even these messengers were clothed in sackcloth.

*Then he sent Eliakim, who was over the household, Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, **covered with sackcloth**, to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz. Isa. 37:2*

This coarse material was often used as a sign of mourning and grief.

sak, from its net-like or sieve-like structure; a word which has descended pure in the Greek *sakkos* and modern languages) is the name of a coarse material, apparently made of goat’s or camel’s hair (Rev 6:12) (from McClintock and Strong Encyclopedia)

The message Hezekiah sent contained a mixture of sorrow and hope. He knew there was nothing within Jerusalem that could help them, but God could help him, so he requests that Isaiah will also pray as he is.

*And they said to him, “Thus says Hezekiah: ‘This day is a day of trouble and rebuke and blasphemy; for the children have come to birth, but there is no strength to bring them forth. 4 It may be that the LORD your God will hear the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to reproach the living God, and will rebuke the words which the LORD your God has heard. **Therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left.**”’ Isa 37:3-7*

They are both praying, and Hezekiah’s prayer is recorded:

*Now because of this **King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah, the son of Amoz, prayed and cried out to heaven**. 2Chr 32:20*

***Then Hezekiah prayed before the LORD**, and said: “O LORD God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. 16 Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God. 17 Truly, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands, 18 and have cast their gods into the fire;*

for they were not gods, but the work of men's hands — wood and stone. Therefore they destroyed them. 19 Now therefore, O LORD our God, I pray, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the LORD God, You alone.” 2Kng. 19:15-19

As they are praying the answer comes from God.

And Isaiah said to them, “Thus you shall say to your master, ‘Thus says the LORD : “Do not be afraid of the words which you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me. 7 Surely I will send a spirit upon him, and he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.””’ Isa 37:6-7

God Hezekiah a wonderful answer. A portion of that answer is given below. For the entire reading read 2Kng. 19:20-34:

Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘Because you have prayed to Me against Sennacherib king of Assyria, I have heard.’ 21 This is the word which the LORD has spoken concerning him: ‘The virgin, the daughter of Zion, Has despised you, laughed you to scorn; The daughter of Jerusalem Has shaken her head behind your back! 22 ‘Whom have you reproached and blasphemed? Against whom have you raised your voice, And lifted up your eyes on high? Against the Holy One of Israel. 2Kng. 19:20-22

Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: ‘He shall not come into this city, Nor shoot an arrow there, Nor come before it with shield, Nor build a siege mound against it. 33 By the way that he came, By the same shall he return; And he shall not come into this city,’ Says the LORD . 34 ‘For I will defend this city, to save it For My own sake and for My servant David’s sake.’” 2K. 19:32-34

God Saved Judah

Soon after this prayer was answered, God sent the angel of the LORD and 185,000 men died in a single night.

And it came to pass on a certain night that the angel* of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses — all dead. 36 So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned home, and remained at Nineveh. 37 Now it came to pass, as he was worshiping in the temple of Nisroch his god, that his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer struck him down with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. Then Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place. 2K. 19:35-37

The Glory from the Victory

This was an amazing act of power. What no other nation had done, Judah, through the help of the LORD had done. It is difficult to put together the exact order of what occurred right after this event.

Thus the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all others, and guided them* on every side. 23 And many brought gifts to the LORD at Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah, so that he was exalted in the sight of all nations thereafter. 2Chr. 32:22-23

From the account we have just read, it is clear that the LORD saved Hezekiah from the hand of “Sennacherib the king of Assyria.” What is new is that it is also revealed that God also saved him “from the hand of all others.” In addition, it is also stated that God “guided them on every side.” The other accounts simply reveal his sickness without giving any time frame. Here these words are placed after the victory and before he became sick.

Did these things happen before the events surrounding Assyria? Did other things happen after this victory that led to these words? We simply don’t have enough information to draw any conclusions. One thing is clear, God had done much to enhance Judah and Hezekiah because of his faithfulness. This is a clear example of something God had said in the Psalms.

I am the LORD your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt; Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it. 11 “But My people would not heed My voice, And Israel would have none of Me. 12 So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, To walk in their own counsels. 13 “Oh, that My people would listen to Me, That Israel would walk in My ways! 14 I would soon subdue their enemies, And turn My

hand against their adversaries. Ps 81:10-14

Because of Hezekiah's faithfulness, God was able to do exactly as He said. He did subdue their enemies, and turned His hand against their adversaries. Because of all this, two wonderful things occurred. First, God's name was glorified and many gifts were brought to the LORD at Jerusalem. We will never know how much good was done and how many turned to Him at that time.

The second thing that occurred was to Hezekiah. He became famous, and not only famous, but exalted. The nations ascribed to him some of the glory that had been given to the LORD. Some of this would be good and wholesome. Hezekiah had been righteous and humble and his faithful service to God had brought this about. But there was also the danger that too much credit was given to him.

Isaiah Prophecies Hezekiah's death.

At the very pinnacle of his reign, when all had come to fruition, and he was ready to enjoy the fruits of his labor, God sent word by Isaiah:

In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, "Thus says the LORD: 'Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live.'" 2K. 20:1

How these words must have cut him to the heart. His faithful service had brought him to the position where he could enjoy the fruits of his labor, and now it was all to be cut off. Those living under the old covenant were accustomed to their faithful service to God bringing long life and prosperity. So God had promised Solomon.

And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days. 14 So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days." 1 Kings 3:13-14

Hezekiah wept bitterly because all his hopes and dreams for the future were cut off.

Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the LORD, 3 and said, "Remember now, O LORD, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what is good in Your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. Isa 38:2-3

Yet while he wept he also prayed. It was a simply prayer but contained great power. It relied upon the one thing that God promised would always avail much and have great power.

The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Jas. 5:16-18

The prayer was so powerful that Isaiah had not even left the city when God revealed to him that he should turn back and again speak with Hezekiah. God then revealed to Hezekiah that he had heard his prayer and seen his tears. God made several promises. First, I will heal you and you will be able to enter the house of the LORD on the third day. Second, I will add fifteen years to your life. Third I will deliver you and the city from Assyria and defend it from all others.

And it happened, before Isaiah had gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying, 5 "Return and tell Hezekiah the leader of My people, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD. 6 And I will add to your days fifteen years. 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 the sake of My servant David.'" 2Kng. 20:4-6

After Isaiah revealed all this, Hezekiah asks for a sign. Obviously he has been deeply shaken by the severity of the disease. He seeks immediate assurance that he will not die. He is given two choices regarding the movement of the sundial. Should the shadow move forward or backward. He chooses the latter as it is much more difficult to accomplish. Much has been written about this sundial and after all has been assessed we still can't be certain. The term sundial is only used twice in the Scriptures and both are about this account, so we have no means of comparison. Some put forth it is a set of stairs that the sun moved up and down upon. Others that it was a sundial Ahaz had found in Assyria. But these are only speculations.

Then Isaiah said, "Take a lump of figs." So they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered. 8 And Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "What is the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of the LORD the third day?" 9 Then Isaiah said, "This is the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing which He has spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees or go backward ten degrees?" 10 And Hezekiah answered, "It is an easy thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees; no, but let the shadow go backward ten degrees." 11 So Isaiah the prophet cried out to the LORD, and He brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down on the sundial of Ahaz. 2Kng. 20:7-11

Isaiah prays to God and God did move the shadow backward. Here again there is a lot of speculation. Many who write in this proclaim God did not move the sun backwards, but only refracted the light to make it appear that it had gone backward. Yet comparing it to Joshua's request, we have the same problem.

Then Joshua spoke to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel: "Sun, stand still over Gibeon; And Moon, in the Valley of Aijalon." 13 So the sun stood still, And the moon stopped, Till the people had revenge Upon their enemies. 14 Is this not written in the Book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day. 14 And there has been no day like that, before it or after it, that the LORD heeded the voice of a man; for the LORD fought for Israel. Josh. 10:12-13

If God could make the sun stand still for an entire day, he can also move the sun backwards. We don't know how God did it, but no matter what He did, it was a miracle of great proportions.

Hezekiah's Writing

Hezekiah's writing appears to be broken down into three distinct parts. Although he writes this after the ordeal, he speaks first of how he felt immediately after Isaiah gave him the news. It is a long writing so we will only quote the main points for our study here.

*This is the writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, **when he had been sick and had sickness:** 10 I said, **"In the prime of my life I shall go to the gates of Sheol; I am deprived of the remainder of my years."** 11 I said, "I shall not see YAH, The LORD* in the land of the living; I shall observe man no more among the inhabitants of the world.* 12 **My life span is gone, Taken from me like a shepherd's tent; I have cut off my life like a weaver. ...** 13 **I have considered until morning** —" Isa 38:9-13*

Although this is written when he "recovered from his sickness," he speaks of his feelings while in the midst of it. When Isaiah left and all he had was a direct revelation of his death from God, he thought these things. He would die in the prime of life. In his fourteenth year of a reign that started when he was 29, he was only 43. It appears that the night after Isaiah had left, he continued to meditate on his situation. At that time the relief of being alive was crushed under the great emotional trauma he had endured. So he carefully considered as the writer of Ecclesiastes had revealed. His day of adversity had come and he would gain as much as possible from it.

Consider the work of God; For who can make straight what He has made crooked? 14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, But in the day of adversity consider: Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, So that man can find out nothing that will come after him. Eccl. 7:13-15

The second part of the writing speaks of what he learned from the experience after he had fully recovered. He begins with the awesome fact that God had spoken to him through Isaiah the prophet. First that he would die and second that he would recover. He then described he resolutions made after it was all over. First, "I shall walk carefully all my years In the bitterness of my soul." Although we could take this to the point of murmuring, that is obviously not the intent. I suspect it is an affirmation of what he intended to do. To try and keep that feeling that brought such humility into his heart for the rest of his life. He says as much later in the writing, when he states that it was for his peace that all this occurred. .

*"What shall I say? **He has both spoken to me,* And He Himself has done it.** I shall walk carefully all my years In the bitterness of my soul. 16 O Lord, by these things men live; And in all these things is the life of my spirit; So You will restore me and make me live. 17 **Indeed it was for my own peace That I had great bitterness;** But You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption, For*

You have cast all my sins behind Your back. Isa. 38:15-17

The third part is praise, adoration, and thanksgiving to God for His salvation and forgiveness.

The living, the living man, he shall praise You, As I do this day; *The father shall make known Your truth to the children. 20 "The LORD was ready to save me; Therefore we will sing my songs with stringed instruments All the days of our life, in the house of the Lord."* Isa 38:19-20

Before leaving this amazing event, we need to consider carefully: Why did God do this? Why send Isaiah to him in this manner. There are three possible answers. The first is an offer to allow him to leave this life at the pinnacle of his faithfulness to God and enter into his rest. The second, a clear sign to Hezekiah that will insulate him from pride. He was going to die and from that day until the end of his life, he would remember that God had spared him and these precious days were a gift from God. Third, knowing the number of his days(fifteen years), would help him fulfill God's desire for each of us that will give us wisdom.

So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom. Ps 90:12

Hezekiah's Final Days

After this event, Hezekiah did nothing that was worthy of being recorded. Only a single event is listed and then a summary of the rest of his life. It appears from something said in Chronicles that this event did not go as well as it should have because God saw in Hezekiah's heart that he wanted to test.

However, regarding the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, whom they sent to him to inquire about the wonder that was done in the land, God withdrew from him, in order to test him, that He might know all that was in his heart. 2Chr. 32:31

This is a fascinating concept. So often we pray for wisdom and providence and God gives it to us, but if we have something in our heart God seeks to test, He may leave us to make our own decisions to see what we are truly made of. It seems God did the same thing to Balaam. First he sought to protect him from a useless and dangerous mission. But when Balaam still sought to go, God allowed him to do so and in that event Balaam destroyed himself.

Of all the envoys that came to Hezekiah to bring him presents and accord him honor, only Babylon is chosen. Probably because of the future dealings that Judah was to have with Babylon. This account is the same in Isaiah and Kings. We will look at the account in Isaiah. It begins with the letter from the king and the reception of the envoys that brought it. Hezekiah was so impressed with them that he wanted to show them just how great Judah was and how much God had blessed them.

At that time Merodach-Baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that he had been sick and had recovered. 2 And Hezekiah was pleased with them, and showed them the house of his treasures — the silver and gold, the spices and precious ointment, and all his armory — all that was found among his treasures. There was nothing in his house or in all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them.* Isa 39:8

After they left. Isaiah was sent by God to help Hezekiah with a bigger picture. First, Isaiah gives Hezekiah a chance to express himself on what he has done.

Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah, and said to him, "What did these men say, and from where did they come to you?" So Hezekiah said, "They came to me from a far country, from Babylon." 4 And he said, "What have they seen in your house?" So Hezekiah answered, "They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them." Isa 39:2-4

Then he tells Hezekiah what will come in the future. Whether He tells him this because he will be partly to blame, or simply to reveal that all the pride he felt in showing it to these people should not be crushed by knowing that everything he had showed them would someday be taken by them. In addition, some of his sons would become eunuchs.

Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD of hosts: 6 'Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried

to Babylon; nothing shall be left,' says the LORD . 7 'And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.'" Isa 39:5-7

His answer doesn't seem to be appropriate. Most of us would show some concern for our offspring, but it appears there is no godly sorrow for what he has done. He is only glad that it won't happen in his days.

So Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "The word of the LORD which you have spoken is good!" For he said, "At least there will be peace and truth in my days." Isa 39:8

This is confirmed with the final words in Chronicles.

But Hezekiah did not repay according to the favor shown him, (gave no return for the benefit he received NASB) for his heart was lifted up; therefore wrath was looming over him and over Judah and Jerusalem. 2Chr 32:25

In Hezekiah's final years he was not able to keep his commitment: *"I shall walk carefully all my years In the bitterness of my soul."* Nor did he fulfill his promise: *"we will sing my songs with stringed instruments All the days of our life, in the house of the Lord."* Instead he *"gave no return for the benefit,"* and did not *"repay for the favor"* God showed him. After God spared his life, his heart was lifted up with pride. What he did with Babylon was among the first of the many things that took him further and further from his God and the faithfulness he had shown in his youth. It went so far that *"wrath was looming over him and over Judah and Jerusalem."* We are not told what they did. But it led to nearly having that wrath poured out upon them. But instead:

we will sing my songs with stringed instruments All the days of our life, in the house of the Lord

Then Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the Lord did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah. 2Chron 32:25

But it was too late to restore the damage that was done. His son and heir, Manasseh, was only 12 when he began to reign so he never saw the Hezekiah that was so devout and godly. Instead he saw the Hezekiah that was so lifted with pride and a nation who followed him that God's wrath was upon them. Yet those final days of repentance must have captured his attention for unlike all other kings of Israel, though wicked in the extreme, he repented in the end and was brought back to Jerusalem from Babylon(2Chr 33:11-13).