

God Extended Hezekiah's Life Because He Prayed Sincerely

Hezekiah and Isaiah Prayed and God Answered

Scripture: Isaiah 38:1-8

Background Scripture: 2 Kings 18 – 2 Kings 20, 2 Chronicles 29 – 2 Chronicles 32

I. Biblical Context

This chapter recounts a significant event during the time of Isaiah, in which he played a crucial role: the serious illness of King Hezekiah and his remarkable recovery. This account is likely included here because Isaiah authored it and documented his influence during a pivotal moment in history. The same story is found in 2 Kings 20:1-11 and 2 Chronicles 32:24-33. In chapters 36 and 37, Hezekiah prays to God for guidance concerning his problems. However, in Chapter 38, God relays a message to Isaiah regarding Hezekiah's future, prompting Hezekiah to pray for a different outcome.

In this chapter, we observe the following key elements:

- Hezekiah's dangerous sickness and the message from God delivered through Isaiah (Isaiah 38:1).
- Hezekiah's prayer for recovery (Isaiah 38:3).
- God's reassurance through Isaiah that Hezekiah's life will be extended by 15 years, along with the sign of the sun moving backward to confirm this promise (Isaiah 38:5-8).
- Hezekiah's written expression of gratitude to God for his recovery (Isaiah 38:9-20).
- The explanation of the effects of Hezekiah's recovery (Isaiah 38:21-22).

II. Historical Background

Hezekiah became the king of Judah at the age of twenty-five and ruled for twenty-nine years. Upon his ascension to the throne, he approached the Levites and urged them to consecrate themselves and purify the temple, as he intended to lead a great revival in Jerusalem. For sixteen days, they worked diligently to remove all defilements and cleanse the temple.

After this purification, Hezekiah gathered the city officials and offered sacrifices, including seven bulls, seven rams, seven male lambs, and seven male goats as a sin

offering for the kingdom, the sanctuary, and Judah. Following the sacrifices, he addressed the people, saying, "You have been dedicated to God; come and bring your sacrifices and thank offerings to the temple of the Lord." Thank offering are acts of gratitude through prayer, praise or acts of service acknowledging God as the source of blessings.

Hezekiah then sent letters to the towns and cities in Judah and Israel, inviting them to celebrate the Passover at the temple. People from both Israel and Judah came to partake in the Festival of Unleavened Bread. However, a challenge arose: many people had not consecrated themselves. In response, Hezekiah prayed that God would pardon everyone who sought Him, even if they were not clean.

They celebrated the Feast of Unleaven Bread for seven days, marking a revival that had not been seen since the days of Solomon and David. The priests and Levites prayed and blessed the people, and God heard their prayers as they reached heaven. When the celebration concluded, the people destroyed the altars, Asherah poles, and high places. Through his efforts, Hezekiah successfully turned the people back to God and initiated a spiritual revival among them.

III. God Extended Hezekiah's Life Because He Prayed Sincerely

1. Verse 1

The timing of Hezekiah's sickness is significant to this event. We can presume that it occurred after the destruction of the Sennacherib army mentioned in Chapter 37. However, I believed that Hezekiah became ill before the destruction of Sennacherib, as verse 6 suggests that God would deliver them from the hands of the Assyrians. Regardless, we do not know the exact nature of Hezekiah's illness, but we do know he had a boil (Isaiah 38:21), and his death was imminent. Therefore, God sent a message through Isaiah, instructing Hezekiah to put his house in order.

This message likely surprised Hezekiah. He ascended to the throne at the age of 25 (2 Kings 18:2), and it had only been 14 years since then. He may not have made any arrangements for his succession, which was crucial for the nation's stability. Isaiah's message indicated that Hezekiah needed to take the necessary steps to ensure that the kingdom would not fall into chaos after his death. This means Hezekiah was to make arrangements regarding his final wishes and his family.

Isaiah's boldness and devotion as a messenger of God are noteworthy. He did not hesitate to go to Hezekiah and deliver the news of his impending death. This announcement reveals that Hezekiah likely did not believe he was in any real danger of dying, possibly due to his faith in God or because his doctors had not fully informed him of his condition.

Friends and relatives often hesitate to deliver bad news to a gravely ill family member. We tend to avoid sharing such information, thinking it might cause stress, worsen their condition, or quicken their death. We believe it is better to keep the person calm, relaxed, and free from worry. However, in Hezekiah's case, the disease was progressing rapidly; it was incurable, and death was inevitable. God deemed it important for Hezekiah to know his true condition, and the prophet was directed to convey this message with faithfulness.

Every person facing the prospect of death should set their house in order. Death is an event that requires preparation. This preparation should not be left to the last moment. Whether death comes sooner or later, we should make our peace with God and arrange our worldly affairs so that we can leave them behind without distraction or regret.

2. Verse 2

The wall of the room in which Hezekiah was lying was probably on a couch next to the wall of his room. Eastern houses usually have couches or ottomans running alongside the room, where the homeowner reclines or rests when sick. Hezekiah probably turned his face to the wall so that the bystanders would not see his emotions and tears or that he could compose himself before praying. He wished to keep his prayer as secret as possible.

3. Verse 3

Hezekiah's primary desire was for his life to be spared so that he would not be abruptly cut off. He shared the account of his life not to boast or justify himself but to provide a reason why his lineage should not be extinguished. Although Hezekiah had not lived as long as many of Israel's previous kings, he was not a worshipper of idol gods. Instead, he led an extensive reformation among the people, using his influence as king to serve God and continue his mission (2 Kings 18). Thus, he prayed for his life to be prolonged so that he could fulfill the imperative plan of reforming the people and establishing the worship of God.

With a pure heart, Hezekiah sought not his own needs but rather the promotion of faith (religion). His focus was on his public role rather than his private feelings. He was acutely aware of his imperfections; however, as king, his influence remained firmly on the side of religion, and he did not deviate from the ways of God (2 Kings 18:3-5).

He wept for several possible reasons: 1) He was childless and lacked a successor to the throne of Judah. 2) He feared that his enemies would interpret his impending death as divine judgment for having stripped the temple of its ornaments (2 Kings 18:16). 3) His tears reflected his deep grief upon receiving the news of his death. In his song of praise to God following his recovery, he stated that the leading cause of his sorrow was the danger of being cut off in the prime of his life, believing that he would likely be denied the blessing of a long life (Isaiah 38:10-16).

4. Verses 4 and 5.

I could not find anything indicating how soon Isaiah left Hezekiah after sharing the news of his death. We do not know if he left immediately after telling him or stayed for a few moments. Additionally, we do not know if Hezekiah prayed right after hearing the news or a few moments later. We can conclude that Isaiah was there to hear Hezekiah's prayer because it is noted in the text. We know that Isaiah was in the middle court when God instructed him to return and give Hezekiah the answer to his prayers (2 Kings 20:4). There is no contradiction in stating that God answered Hezekiah's prayer immediately.

This is the only instance where a man has been told exactly how long he would live. We do not know why God specified this duration. It was a complete answer to Hezekiah's prayer, and the promise clearly demonstrates that God hears prayers and answers them promptly. It is entirely appropriate for a child of God to pray for life. In times of sickness, even when death seems inevitable, it is not improper to pray for healing and the extension of life. If the intention is to do good, to advance the kingdom of God, to benefit others, or to fulfill a benevolent plan that has already begun, then it would be right to pray for God to prolong one's life.

5. Verse 6.

The promise was made to ensure that Hezekiah and Jerusalem would be completely and finally delivered from any threat posed by the Assyrian invasion. There may have been concerns that Sennacherib would assemble a large army and return, or that his successor would continue the war that Sennacherib had initiated.

However, Hezekiah was assured that he had nothing to fear from the Assyrians (Isaiah 37:35).

6. Verses 7 & 8.

Isaiah does not mention the medical treatment of Hezekiah until verses 21 and 22. He goes immediately to the answer to Hezekiah's question, "What will be the sign that the Lord will heal me and that I will go up into the temple of the Lord on the third day" (2 Kings 20:8). The essential thing to note here is that God gave Hezekiah proof that he would do as he promised. That promise is that he would recover and be able to go to the temple in three days.

The only other reference to a sundial, specifically a location rather than an actual sundial, in the scriptures is found at the palace steps of Ahaz (2 Kings 20:11). This is also mentioned in the parallel account in 2 Kings 20:9-10, where the details of the miracle are more fully explained.

⁹Isaiah answered, "This is the Lord's sign to you that He will fulfill what He has promised: Shall the shadow go forward ten steps, or shall it go back ten steps?" ¹⁰Hezekiah responded, "It is easy for the shadow to go forward ten steps; rather, let it go back ten steps."

Typically, the sun sets, so a reverse movement would be a remarkable sign of the miracle. Hezekiah requested that the sun move backward from its usual path, which would leave no doubt that it was a message from God. Isaiah prayed to the Lord, and the sun moved backward ten degrees down the stairway of the palace of Ahaz.

IV. Conclusion

This lesson clearly demonstrates the power of prayer. We observe both Hezekiah and Isaiah praying, and their prayers are answered immediately. Hezekiah's prayer is answered with a message from the prophet, assuring him that his life will be extended and that the people of Israel will no longer have to face the Assyrians. Isaiah's prayer is answered when he asks God for the sun to move back ten degrees.

Therefore, we should have confidence that when we pray, God hears us and answers our prayers swiftly. While we may not always see the immediate impact that Hezekiah or Isaiah experienced, we can trust that God hears us and begins to put His plan into action to answer those prayers.