

## 2nd Kings Chapters 19-20 - John Karmelich

1. My lesson title is "What makes this king (Hezekiah) so special and what does that teach us about our own relationship with God"? Confused? Good, let me explain. In this lesson we finish the story of King Hezekiah. In the last lesson, the bible referred to him as the best of all the kings of the Southern Kingdom. As we read through the text of these two chapters, we mostly read about a bunch of things that he did wrong. The Assyrian Empire was destroying his kingdom and he didn't know what to do about it. If that wasn't bad enough, the prophet Isaiah told him that God said it's time for him to die. He prays for more time, gets it and then does a number of things that has negative repercussions for generations to come. All in all, it is not a pretty picture of the life of this king.
  - a) As I read all of that, I kept thinking about Verse 3 from Chapter 18. It says, "He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father (ancestor- King) David had done." As I studied the life of this king here in these two chapters, I kept thinking, why does the last chapter say this was the best of all the kings? Based on these 2 chapters, he was far from perfect and made a lot of mistakes in his lifetime. The point is he trusted in God despite all of his mistakes to guide him through his life and use his life for God's glory.
  - b) That's the key point for you and me to get here. God does not expect perfection from us. At the same time, He does expect us to avoid sin as much as possible mainly because that is the best way to live out our lives. The issue's about trusting Him to guide our lives and using our lives for His glory. That's why Hezekiah was a great king. Not because he was mistake free, but because he tried to live his life for God's glory. Yes he made mistakes, as we'll read about in this lesson. At the same time, Hezekiah always sought God for his life and that's the key issue to live by that we learn in this lesson.
2. With that said, let me change topics for the moment and discuss two great miracles that occurred in these two chapters. The first is an angel came one night and somehow killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers who were at that moment surrounding the city of Jerusalem. The bible does not say how this angel did it, just that he did. The point being for us is that when a situation seems impossible to handle, God can and does step in to say in effect, "I said I'm in charge and I mean it". What can be impossible for us to deal with is possible for God to solve. Does that mean I can trust for God to jump in my impossible situation? Of course not. However, it does mean that if we are trusting Him to guide our lives, we should never rule out the possibility of Him working in a way that is impossible to explain in human terms. The point is Hezekiah trusted that God is going to work out the king's life for His glory and He did.
  - a) The second unexplained miracle is Hezekiah asks God for a miracle to prove that He is going to help him and to make a long story short, the king has a sundial and that dial somehow moves back 10 degrees. I don't know what that meant in terms of time or how that miracle actually occurred. I just accept that it did. The point of both of these miracles is that sometimes God will do things in our world that are beyond our explanations. As I like to say, it is His world to do with as He pleases. That means He can mess with time or wipe out a large army if that is His desire.
  - b) OK, God can do what He wants. I accept that. I don't get those types of miracles in my life so why should I care about any of this stuff? The point is to realize that if this is His world, we should use our time to glorify Him with our lives. That is what made this king so special that is what can make us special as well. We're not all called to be kings or have great power or fame, but we can use what time we have to make a difference for God and that's what we learn from studying this king in spite of all the mistakes he made. To sum it up, yes we have to do what is necessary in order to live and support our own lives but we can also use our lives for His glory while we are doing that and that's the point of this lesson. The rest is the details. Speaking of which, time to get started.

Chapter 19, Verse 1: When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of the LORD. <sup>2</sup> He sent Eliakim the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary and the leading priests, all wearing sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz. <sup>3</sup> They told him, "This is what Hezekiah says: This day is a day of distress and rebuke and disgrace, as when children come to the point of birth and there is no strength to deliver them. <sup>4</sup> It may be that the LORD your God will hear all the words of the field commander, whom his master, the king of Assyria, has sent to ridicule the living God, and that he will rebuke him for the words the LORD your God has heard. Therefore pray for the remnant that still survives."

- c) Our story starts off today with the Southern Kingdom in big trouble. Remember that we are now at a point in the book where the Northern Kingdom of Israel is no longer exists. The remainder of the book of Kings only focuses on the Southern Kingdom of Judah.
  - i) Therefore, unless I need to make a comment about the Northern Kingdom, I'm just going to refer to the Southern one only. That end of the other kingdom was "fresh news" and now the same empire that destroyed the North is now trying city-by-city to destroy the only remaining kingdom of Israelites.
- d) I say all of this as the King of Judah, named Hezekiah was mourning the loss of people in his own kingdom as well as the destruction of the other one. Because this was a man who feared God and sought Him for protection, our story opens with the king tearing his robe (I assume in a public way that people saw) and putting on an uncomfortable garment that was used to show sorrow called a sackcloth. Bottom line is the king was depressed. The king then went into The Temple. No he didn't violate the priest's duty of offering incense but just went into the first part that any Israelite man could enter with permission.
- e) Now let me put this in our terms: Dear God, things are really bad right now. Most of the Israelites, between the larger territory Northern Kingdom and parts of Hezekiah's one in the Southern parts of Israel are now dead and gone. The Assyrian Empire (based out of Northern Iran) has destroyed those places and the Israelites that survived the attacks are now deported all over that empire. Therefore God, I (Hezekiah) don't know what to do. However I do know there is a prophet living at this time in Israel (Isaiah). Therefore I'll send him some of the top officers were sent by the king to Isaiah with the plea to ask God for help in this difficult situation.
- f) OK John, we don't have an Isaiah that we can turn to for God's help. No, but we have something much better. We can turn to God Himself. OK, so why didn't this king just pray directly to God. Why call Isaiah in the picture? The answer would be like thinking, "I don't know what to do. Let's go talk the guy who spends all of his time focusing upon God and ask for his help." It would be like if you are the "religious one" in one's extended family and a relative thinks, let me go ask him or her, as they pray all the time. It kind of reminds me of my extended family gatherings when one of my relatives will ask either me or one my daughters to pray because they know we do a lot of that sort of thing.
  - i) Bottom line here is that Isaiah was associated with being God's prophet at that moment in history. Therefore some of the top officials all wearing sackcloth like the king went to go see Isaiah and say in effect, "help".
  - ii) Speaking of personalizing this, why doesn't God jump in the picture when my situation is desperate? The answer is He does. I know that because you are now alive and reading this lesson. I heard a definition of anxiety that I love: It is when we worry about our future when we don't put God in the picture. That in effect is what the king is doing to open this chapter.
- g) Now comes the good part: When they get to Isaiah in the next few verses, we are going to read the start of God's response. I believe God will effectively say, I never turn down any request to help those who seek Me. We may not realize how God is helping us nor do we understand how He works, but in hindsight when we do seek Him, we can see how He is guiding is the whole time. With that thought in mind, it's time for the details:

3. Verse 5: When King Hezekiah's officials came to Isaiah, <sup>6</sup> Isaiah said to them, "Tell your master, 'This is what the LORD says: Do not be afraid of what you have heard--those words with which the underlings of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me.' <sup>7</sup> Listen! I am going to put such a spirit in him that when he hears a certain report, he will return to his own country, and there I will have him cut down with the sword.' "
- a) Before I discuss these verses themselves, let me give a quick word about how God deals with us compared to how God deals with those who want to hurt us. There is a biblical based expression that goes, "Judgment begins with God's household" based on 1st Peter 4:17. That simply means God is tougher on those of us who know more about Him than those who don't, as we are a living witness for Him. So are you saying nothing bad will ever happen to us when we pray? Not that I've seen. I am saying that God's standard of judgment is tougher on believers in this lifetime, but eternally, it is much tougher on those who want to do harm to believers. Bottom line is it is worth all of the suffering we may receive in this lifetime as a witness for Jesus than it is to spend eternity without Him.
    - i) In summary: Living to be a witness for Jesus is a tough way to live due to stricter judgment. However, the eternal consequences are much worse if we don't.
  - b) Ok and what does all of that, have to do with these verses? Everything. Here we read of Isaiah reassuring the Hezekiah effectively that God is in charge and not the Assyria King. God is saying to Hezekiah, you don't have to worry about what this king can do to you, as I'm in charge, not him. Then to reassure the Jewish king that what God says is true, Isaiah then says that the Assyrian king will here a report that will cause him to return home and there he will die. The point for you and me is, we don't have to worry (anxiety) about our future as God is in control. That does not mean avoiding hard work. It just means letting go of fears of what might happen that are beyond our control.
    - i) Ok John, if all of that is true, why did God allow this and that bad thing to happen to me or someone I care about? Why did God allow someone I love to die? The first answer is our world is cursed by sin. He never promises to alleviate sin from our world, just give us peace through whatever we're dealing with at the moment.
    - ii) So what do we do when problems arise? Pray, work our way through them. Do the best we can with the situation hand and trust that He's guiding us through the tough situations of life for His glory. When one feels overwhelmed by problems of the moment, one has to remember that God is in charge and He cares about us too much to let our problems take over our life. In summary, anxiety is again, the issue of worrying about our problems without putting God in the middle of them.
    - iii) That is what Hezekiah was suffering from here, and took the issue to God how he knew how to, by sending messengers dressed for a funeral (in sackcloth) to go see the prophet Isaiah. With that said, we're ready for the next few verses.
4. Verse 8: When the field commander heard that the king of Assyria had left Lachish, he withdrew and found the king fighting against Libnah.
- a) John's loose translation: The thing that the king of Israel was worried about, the Assyrian army destroying Jerusalem, just ended for the moment. The general in charge of attacking Israel just left with the army as he heard that his boss, the king of Assyria was fighting in another location. The point here is the thing that Hezekiah feared the most, didn't happen as that king let go of his fears and put God in the middle of the picture.
  - b) Ok you may say, I've prayed about my problems and they are still there. Welcome to the club. God never promises to make our problems magically go away, although sometimes I have seen that happens. What usually happens is God guides us through whatever it is we have to deal with for His glory and that is what is happening here.
  - c) The point here is that God is trying to teach us through the Israelite king is that He exists, He is there, He want to guide our lives for His glory and use us in whatever situation we find ourselves in at the moment for His glory. On that positive note, back to the text.

5. Verse 9: Now Sennacherib received a report that Tirhakah, the Cushite king of Egypt, was marching out to fight against him. So he again sent messengers to Hezekiah with this word: <sup>10</sup>"Say to Hezekiah king of Judah: Do not let the god you depend on deceive you when he says, 'Jerusalem will not be handed over to the king of Assyria.' <sup>11</sup> Surely you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the countries, destroying them completely. And will you be delivered? <sup>12</sup> Did the gods of the nations that were destroyed by my forefathers deliver them: the gods of Gozan, Haran, Rezeph and the people of Eden who were in Tel Assar? <sup>13</sup> Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, or of Hena or Ivvah?"
- a) Ok, these verses are full of names of people and cities. Let me make this simple. The main character in this paragraph is a guy from the last lesson. He is the king's general who insulted not only the king of Israel but the God of Israel in the last chapter. The point here is simply that this enemy of Israel heard that the Egyptian army was coming to fight against him. The underlying point is that this Assyrian king wanted to threaten Hezekiah by saying that the Assyrians have already destroyed lots of other places, and whether or not Egypt comes on the scene, the Assyrians will win like we have a dozen times before in the cities listed here.
  - b) The problem with these verses is that this Sennacherib character didn't realize that God is in charge of the world around him, not the Assyrian Empire. The point being is that God allowed this Assyrian Empire to grow and become His instrument of judgment against the Northern Kingdom of Israel as they refused to turn to Him. However, it is not God's will for the Assyrians to be God's instrument of judgment against Jerusalem, as we'll soon discover in a few verses.
  - c) Understand that this Assyrian general refused to believe in an all-powerful God that is in control of all things. This guy trusted in his own local "deity" and probably trusted in the large army he was controlling. Here he is making threats against the God of the Israelites as to say that He is not all powerful. We'll read of his fate coming up later in this chapter.
  - d) In the meantime, we are now going to read Hezekiah's reaction to this letter.
6. Verse 14: Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the LORD and spread it out before the LORD. <sup>15</sup> And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD: "O LORD, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. <sup>16</sup> Give ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to insult the living God.
- a) Personally, I find this whole scene a little funny. Hezekiah, king of Jerusalem, took this threatening letter he got from the Assyrian general, and laid it before God in the temple. Does that mean God was not aware of this letter as it was written? Of course He was. Could Hezekiah have laid out the letter where he lived and not place it at the temple? Of course. The point is not the physical act of how Hezekiah took that letter to the temple. The point is Hezekiah in his own way, was humbling himself before God. This act says that Hezekiah is turning the problem over to God as He doesn't know what to do next.
  - b) I have found that God does His best work when we turn our worries over to Him and say in effect, "This is Your problem, I can't handle it." When we let go of our worries about a situation and get our focus off of Him is when fears grow. I admit I am writing this in the middle of the night as worries about some potential problems are starting to overtake me.
    - i) Writing about them and realizing that God is in charge helps me to let go of my own situation and realize God is in charge of my life as well. Hopefully reading this will help you to realize that as you read about God helping Hezekiah deal with his own mess here in these verses.
  - c) Let me address the issue of praying about a problem and it is still there. Again, God does not usually magically make our problems go away in moments. What He does is promise to guide us through tough situations. That's what He is doing for the Hezekiah and that is what He promises to do for us if we are willing to let go and trust Him with our lives.

7. Verse 17: "It is true, O LORD, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands.<sup>18</sup> They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by men's hands.<sup>19</sup> Now, O LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O LORD, are God."
- a) We read here of Hezekiah thinking out his problems as he lays this letter before God. Yes of course God didn't need us to actually spread out a letter before Him. It is a symbolic way of saying "Dear God, this is your problem, deal with it."
  - b) Hezekiah is reminding himself that the other gods that his neighbors worshipped were not true gods, but just things that people invented to satisfy the desire we all have to go and worship something greater than ourselves. Whenever one meets someone who does not care at all about God, remember that God has created all of us with a need to worship something greater than ourselves. When we suppress that need, it comes out in ways and that includes worship of idols, then and now.
    - i) Let me explain that a little better. People today will worship say sports or movie stars thinking their lives would be better if we were more like them. People desire power thinking life would be better if they were more in control of situations. The problem comes down to not willing to let go of our issues and giving them to God. It is about wanting to be in charge ourselves or thinking others have it better than us because they have a gift to say entertain people or rule over people. Hezekiah here is reminding himself that God is in charge and not idols that we make. What we read here is Hezekiah is turning his problem over to God because his problems were too big for him to handle by himself.
    - ii) Coming back to my lesson title, recall that Hezekiah was considered the greatest of all the kings of "Southern Israel" to date. It wasn't that he was a stronger leader or a better one. Hezekiah made lots of mistakes like all of us do. It's just that he was willing to turn his life over to God to run and that is what made him special.
  - c) The secret of living a great life for God is not about trying harder. It is about realizing that He is in charge, and not us. Then we can do great things through His power. But what about all of those famous people we read about who have gifts to do special things? The answer is that God gave them those gifts and being jealous doesn't make our lives better. To say it another way, focus on what God has called you and me to do and not focus on what gifts God has given others to do whether they use them for His glory or not. In the meantime, it is time to get back to King Hezekiah and dealing with the very real problem of a large army wanting to destroy what remains of Israel as a nation.
8. Verse 20: Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent a message to Hezekiah: "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I have heard your prayer concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria.<sup>21</sup> This is the word that the LORD has spoken against him: "The Virgin Daughter of Zion despises you and mocks you. The Daughter of Jerusalem tosses her head as you flee.
- a) To understand these verses, first realize that from Verse 21 all the way to Verse 32, we are reading a poem. Time for my quick reminder about Hebrew poetry: The last word or the last syllable does not rhyme with the last syllable in the next phrase in the Hebrew like it does in English poetry. The point of Hebrew poetry is about connecting the thoughts.
    - i) The most famous example is "Spare the rod, spoil the child". That's an abbreviated form of Proverbs 13:24. The point being is that the two thoughts don't make sense by themselves, but together they form a principal to live by. I state this here for us to realize as we read this poetry over the next dozen verses or so, we are going to read God's response to Hezekiah's prayer for help in a poetic way.
    - ii) Before I begin, let me explain why God responds this way. Why doesn't God just tell the king directly, "Here is what you do to get out of your jam!" The answer is God wants us to see the problem from His perspective, thus, this poem.

- iii) Next, realize poems are easier to remember than straight answers. Think about all of the lyrics to songs we know by heart. Words in poetic form stick in our minds better, just like "spare the rod, spoil the child" sticks in our memory.
  - b) All of that preparation leads me back to these verses. The prophet Isaiah is known for having the largest book of prophecy in the bible. (66 chapters, lots to study). He is also prominent in this section of the book of Kings. The point here is simply that somehow he finds out about what the king did and speaking for God, gives this long message to tell us how God views the united and separated nation of Israel and what he thinks about the Assyrian general who doesn't think much of the God of Israel.
  - c) OK, one last thing, then I promise I'll start on the poem itself. There is a classic expression I like to share every now and then that fits well here: The biggest mistake Jewish people make is they fail to see Jesus as their promised Messiah. The biggest mistake non-Jewish Christians make is they fail to see God as a "Jewish God". I state that here as a reminder that as we read of the "God of Israel", it is the same God that rules over the world that we do worship. With that said, onto the poetry.
  - d) The first phrase in the poetry to notice is "The Virgin Daughter of Zion despises you" as stated in Verse 21. Ok, who is that and why should I care? The reference is to the fact that since the Israelites first conquered the land of Israel, and took over Jerusalem, nobody has yet to take that city from Jewish control. That is why in this poetic way, Hezekiah who is a king ruling from Jerusalem, is being reminded that this city is a "virgin daughter" in the sense it has not been conquered and God is in control of who is in charge there.
    - i) Remember that Hezekiah's fear was this large army surrounding Jerusalem was going to destroy the city. God is saying through Isaiah in effect, that God alone is in charge of this city and no threat by any army can change that.
    - ii) Now think about modern Jerusalem and the desire of many nations to destroy that country and take over that city. My point is nothing much has changed over the millenniums and similar problems still exist today. Again, I can only sleep well when I remind myself that God is in charge, and not me. It is when we let go of our fears of what can happen and realize again He is in charge, that my fears no longer overtake me. Is it possible that modern Jerusalem could be overtaken one day by non-Jewish people? Only if it is God's will. Meanwhile we have to back in time a few millenniums to continue reading what God has to say to Hezekiah:
9. Verse 22: Who is it you have insulted and blasphemed? Against whom have you raised your voice and lifted your eyes in pride? Against the Holy One of Israel! <sup>23</sup> By your messengers you have heaped insults on the Lord. And you have said, "With my many chariots I have ascended the heights of the mountains, the utmost heights of Lebanon. I have cut down its tallest cedars, the choicest of its pines. I have reached its remotest parts, the finest of its forests. <sup>24</sup> I have dug wells in foreign lands and drunk the water there. With the soles of my feet I have dried up all the streams of Egypt."
- a) John's loose translation of God talking: "Who do you think you are messing with? Yes you have accomplished some great things. However, you have only accomplished those things because I (God), have allowed you to do those things." The king of the Assyrian Empire doesn't realize who is really in charge here!
  - b) Let me personalize this for a moment: When we read of things that other people have accomplished we can get jealous or even have fear of what they can do to us. Like the king of the Jewish people here, we have to realize that God is in charge and He allows what He allows for His purposes. We don't have to fear what our enemies can and will do to us, as God is in charge and whatever He allows is His will. Yes of course we have to make the best decisions possible with the information at hand. Still, the point is to let go of our worries as again, He is in charge of our lives, not us. With that said, back to poetry:

10. Verse 25: " `Have you not heard? Long ago I ordained it. In days of old I planned it; now I have brought it to pass, that you have turned fortified cities into piles of stone. <sup>26</sup> Their people, drained of power, are dismayed and put to shame. They are like plants in the field, like tender green shoots, like grass routing on the roof, scorched before it grows up.
- a) Time for more of my very loose translation: You Assyrians, you think it was your idea to go conquer all of these places and develop this large empire? Let me set you straight of who is really in charge. I, the God of the Israelites am also the God of the whole world and I know all of history before it happens. I know what you did around the greater area and I allowed it to happen ultimately for my own glory. The only reason you conquered much of the land of Israel so far, is because I have allowed it to happen. The Israelites are My chosen people and because they've refused to listen to Me for many generations, I've allowed you to conquer much of this land in order to get the rest of the Israelites to pay attention to Me. In other words, I did what was necessary in order for my people to focus upon Me and I'm using you (the Assyrians) to accomplish my goals.
  - b) So John, are you saying that God ordained this group to conquer and kill lots of people? Yes. As I need to remind myself every now and then, if this is God's world, then He has every right to do with it as He pleases. If this life is all that there is, life would be a very unfair place to live. However, if we live forever and God judges us based on how we live that is the only way I can have peace and sleep well at night. (Yes I went back to sleep a few pages back.) In this particular case, God allowed the Assyrian Empire to be raised up so He could use it in judgment over His own people, the Israelites.
  - c) That leads me back to the current king of Judah (Southern Kingdom) and all of the people who had to hear the threats that the Assyrian general was making to the Israelites. Recall that this general was speaking to them in Hebrew and threatening their lives. Now God is responding by saying in effect, "Hey, who's really in charge here? The only reason that you Assyrian's are even here in the first place is that I God, allowed it to happen. So stop taking credit for your victories and realize who's really calling the shots around here."
  - d) Meanwhile, I made the horrible mistake of interrupting God when He's on a role.
11. Verse 27: " `But I know where you stay and when you come and go and how you rage against me. <sup>28</sup> Because you rage against me and your insolence has reached my ears, I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth, and I will make you return by the way you came.'
- a) Time for one more loose translation: "You think you are special because you have a large army parked around Jerusalem? I (God) have seen the letter you sent to Hezekiah, and I am in charge, not you, the Assyrians. Because you refuse to believe I'm greater than the gods you worship and you think you can conquer this city anytime you feel like it, I am about to show you people who is really in charge around here."
  - b) To be specific God is saying he will turn away this army the same way one might control an animal using a hook in a nose or a bit in a mouth. Yes it is a cruel picture, but the point is God is not to be messed with and the Assyrian general was insulting God here.
  - c) The application is obvious that "God is not to be messed with". Still there's still the matter of the large army surrounding Jerusalem, but as we'll read in a matter of verses, even that will come to an end very soon.
12. Verse 29: "This will be the sign for you, O Hezekiah: "This year you will eat what grows by itself, and the second year what springs from that. But in the third year sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat their fruit. <sup>30</sup> Once more a remnant of the house of Judah will take root below and bear fruit above.
- a) Here God changes His focus from the Assyrians to King Hezekiah. Remember that this large army has been camping in the farmland surrounding the city. Therefore the king was worried about what they would do for food. God reassures Hezekiah by saying in effect, "you will eat what grows by itself for the next two years and in the third year, you (residents of Jerusalem) can plant again and the land will bear up things. "

- b) Stop and think about this from the perspective of Hezekiah, the king. He must have been thinking that even if God struck the bad general dead and his army dead; the land used to grow things is ruined by this army. That's why God's reassuring the king that He will not only stop an attacking army, but He'll also take care of our needs. It's a reminder that He cares about those who trust in Him and He'll make a way to take care of our needs if it is His desire, even and especially if we can't see a way of getting out of a situation.
13. Verse 31: For out of Jerusalem will come a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.
- a) This is God reminding Hezekiah and us that there will always be some survivors of those who trust in Him. Let me now go forward to the 20th Century for a moment. Hitler made an attempt to kill every last Jewish person that lived. He managed to kill about 1 of 3 that lived. My point is God will always have a Jewish remnant so that when Jesus does return to rule from Israel, there will be an Israel to rule from. Yes in context, this does refer to a time in ancient history when God wiped out the Assyrian Empire to prevent them from conquering Jerusalem. I also believe it's prophetic to say that God will always have some of His people, in this context, people of Jewish backgrounds, in Jerusalem despite any and all attempts to wipe them out as a nation. On that uplifting note, time to get back to God's speech to Hezekiah.
- b) By the way, my personal view of this is that Isaiah was taking dictation from God here and the exact words were preserved in the king's records, which is why when "Kings" was put together many years later, the words were recorded as they originally occurred.
- c) In the next part of this poem, God through Isaiah is going to turn his attention to the army that is currently surrounding Jerusalem.
14. Verse 32: "Therefore this is what the LORD says concerning the king of Assyria: "He will not enter this city or shoot an arrow here. He will not come before it with shield or build a siege ramp against it. <sup>33</sup> By the way that he came he will return; he will not enter this city, declares the LORD. <sup>34</sup> I will defend this city and save it, for my sake and for the sake of David my servant."
- a) Try to picture a large army surrounding a walled city and being inside of that city. Now you get a message from God that not one arrow will fly over the wall and hit anything. That alone would impress me as a sign from God. As to a "siege ramp", picture a device used to climb over a high wall. The point is God is saying through Isaiah that this type of device will not be used against this city.
- b) Then God says that He will protect this city for the sake of King David, who lived about three hundred years prior to this event. God made an unconditional promise to David that his descendants would be kings for a long time and that "The" King would also be a direct descendant of David. Therefore God is saying that the royal line that Hezekiah was a part of will not end here and today. In other words, Hezekiah does not have to fear either his or his descendant's life coming to an end, despite the large army surrounding that city because God's unconditional promises still stand true then as it does today.
- c) Let me modernize this for us: It's now been about 2,000 years since Jesus said that He would return to rule from Jerusalem. How can we trust in a promise that old? The same way that Hezekiah could trust in God when a large army is surrounding that city. It is a matter of faith that God is still working His way and on His timing in the world around us. The reason God is waiting so long is simply because He wants as many people as possible to be saved. Yet there is coming a day where God says "OK, that's it" and then starts the "Book of Revelation" bad stuff to put it very simply.
- i) This is also a good time to remind all of us that one cannot find the starting date of "end times" based on the bible. When Jesus was on earth, God the Father didn't reveal to Him that date nor did angels know it. That was written so that we don't go searching the bible trying to figure the date out. (See Matthew 24:36, et. al.).
- ii) Meanwhile, let's read what happens here to the Assyrian army:



15. Verse 35: That night the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning--there were all the dead bodies!
- a) I have to admit, one of my favorite bible teachers Chuck Missler teaches this passage as well as I've ever heard anyone teach it. His view is "Don't mess with angels. They are not cute little baby like creatures. One of them, after dinner one night went and killed 185,000 people. Personally, I would not want to take on any of them."
  - b) I admit, I wondered how the Israelites knew the exact or approximate number. How did they know there were 185,000 people killed and not say 190,000? One way was that there were spotters on the wall of Jerusalem who estimated the size of the army surrounding that city. The other way, which I suspect is true, is that the Israelites had to go bury all of them after this killing was over and that's how they knew the count.
  - c) Bottom line here was that Hezekiah and the Israelites feared this large army that was at the moment surrounding Jerusalem. God said in effect, "Stop worrying about them. I'm going to wipe them out in one moment of time and they'll no longer be a problem." The obvious lesson here is simply that God is not to be messed with, then or now.
16. Verse 36: So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there. <sup>37</sup> One day, while he was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer cut him down with the sword, and they escaped to the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son succeeded him as king.
- a) First, don't struggle trying to pronounce all of these Assyrian names. Let me share with you what we do know based on actual records found from this empire. The king of this empire still refused to believe in God even after seeing (or hearing about) this miracle that occurred at Jerusalem. He went back home to their capitol. Assyrian records state that the two sons who killed him were jealous, as another brother would be king. No matter what happened, the point is this large Assyrian army was now gone. Bottom line is two of this king's sons killed dad and then another of the king's sons took over as king.
  - b) The point for you and me simply is that there are historical records found that support the bible story as accurate. Recently my daughter asked me, how do I know Christianity is the correct religion? I responded with MAPS, or "Manuscripts, Archeology, Prophecy and Statistics." Without giving a big speech here, all four of those studies show the accuracy of Scripture. Here we see an example of archeology supporting the bible. (Manuscripts is about the great number of bible manuscripts in existence. Prophecy is describing all the accurate predictions the bible makes in advance and finally statistics refers to all of the accurate predictions about Jesus literally coming true or considering the statistical odds of the accuracy of the bible. Bottom line is they all support the bible as accurate.)
17. Chapter 20, Verse 1: In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, "This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover."
- a) To understand this verse, we have to start with the phrase "In those days". We are going back in time a little here. The other clue we have is in Verse 6 where it refers the King of Assyria attacking the Israelites. Since the whole army was wiped out in Chapter 19, that is how we know this is going back in time.
    - i) OK, why are we backtracking here? It leads back to my lesson introduction: King Hezekiah was far from perfect. More mistakes he made as the king are told in this short chapter. It is a reminder that God loves us unconditionally and still holds us accountable for our actions at the same time. To state the key point of this lesson again, God loves us just because He does. He judges us based on how we have lived out our lives, but His love is unconditional. Hezekiah is called the greatest of the Southern Kings not because he was perfect, but because he did seek God all the days of his life. That leads me right back to these verses:

- b) The next thing to notice about these verses is the prophet Isaiah said that the king is about to die. The only other person I can think of where God literally warned him that "Now is the time you are about to die" is Moses Himself. Moses didn't ask for more time, he just did what God commanded him to do in his remaining time, to read Deuteronomy to the Israelites. That leads me to ponder, why did God warn Hezekiah here in the first place?
    - i) The short answer is that God often tests us to see how we react and if we are still going to trust in Him even when we receive bad news.
    - ii) So can someone tell us when our time is up? I believe only God knows when our time and I would not take anyone seriously who gave that prediction to me. I just know I need to make the most of the time God has given me. In the meantime let's see how Hezekiah the king reacts to this news:
18. Verse 2: Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, <sup>3</sup> "Remember, O LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.
- a) To put it simply, when Hezekiah got this news, he turned to God in prayer and essentially asked for more time to live. Notice Hezekiah focused on himself and not God. He didn't pray God, give me more time because You are in charge of all things. He essentially said, "Give me more time as I've been a good boy". The text also states he cried over his death.
  - b) One has to keep in mind that Isaiah gave this news to the king as an established prophet of God. The proper response should have been, "OK, God, You and not me are in charge of my life. If You say, "that's it", help me to accept it. " With that said, let's read on.
19. Verse 4: Before Isaiah had left the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him: <sup>5</sup> "Go back and tell Hezekiah, the leader of my people, `This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you. On the third day from now you will go up to the temple of the LORD. <sup>6</sup> I will add fifteen years to your life. And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city for my sake and for the sake of my servant David.' "
- a) To read these verses, remember that Isaiah had just delivered this message to the king. Now as Isaiah was walking away, God tells Isaiah in effect, "The king just prayed for Me to give him more time. Therefore tell the king I heard his prayer and I'll give him 15 more years as a king". That leads me to wonder, why have a middleman? Why not have God just tell the king directly that message? I suspect the answer is that God wanted Isaiah to be established as a prophet, so he was the middleman of the message.
  - b) I have to admit, verses like these remind me of the true power of prayer. Does that mean if the king had not prayed, he would have not gotten those years? Probably. Does it also mean that we can pray for extra time? Sure. However, it is up to God to say yes or now as we pray, so keep that in mind. My view is that God knows the exact length of my life and it is not up to me to question that time frame.
    - i) In fact, both in this chapter and in the next chapter we're going to learn what a big mistake it was historically for Hezekiah to ask for that time. In the last part of this chapter, we'll read about one mistake he made in that time. Also, the next chapter is about the rise of the king's son who was one of the worst of all these kings. Yes the next king was born during that final 15-year period.
  - c) However, this final time span is not all bad. In fact this is also the time period when the king of Assyria lost and the 185,000 were killed because they threatened the Israelites. In fact, the final part of the verse mentions God's promise to King David, that He'd protect Jerusalem from invaders and the proof of that was the wiping out of that army. However, that is now old news from this lesson and we can move on.
  - d) If there is a lesson to be learned here, it is simply about accepting God's will, good or bad when it comes to the difficult issue of death. Remember God is always asking us, "Do you trust Me, even now, even through whatever we are dealing with at the moment?"

- e) Before I move on, I notice the phrase, "on the third day you will go up to the temple of the Lord" from Verse 5. The king was just told by the prophet Isaiah that he'll die soon. Now the king is told he'll get more time and three days from now he needs to go to the temple to show gratitude for his recovery. This shows that God heard his prayer and responded to it. Was it God's will for him to live another 15 years? I would argue no, only because I know Israel's history went downhill from here based on what happened during that next time frame. It's kind of like God saying, "I know what's best for you. However, if you do want to exercise your free will and let the consequences play out, I can teach you the hard way that I know what's best for your life."
- i) So are you saying that if we pray hard enough we can live out here forever? No. I am saying that God sometimes gives us what we want to show us that it would be better if we would just have trusted Him in the first place. I'm also not saying that God is going to tell us when we're going to die. I am saying the bible gives us our instructions on the best way to live. When we ignore that instructions, that's when we're telling God in effect "We know better than you" and suffer the consequences.
20. Verse 7: Then Isaiah said, "Prepare a poultice of figs." They did so and applied it to the boil, and he recovered.
- a) I admit I have no idea if figs have any medical power over boils. Maybe it does and if I do ever suffer from boils, I'd probably run to the grocery store to try this. One thing to learn from this verse is that God is not anti-medicine. Most of us who have lived a good while are aware that certain foods are beneficial for certain ailments. There are some very good natural cures for things as well as doctor prescribed medicines. My point is I'm not one of those Christians who say, "Go pray about it and don't see a doctor". I'd rather pray over a disease while rushing to a doctor for help.
- b) The point here is God told this king that he would recover and until that happened, Isaiah applied a medical treatment that was probably common at that time. I don't know if figs just helps to ease the pain or actually cures the boils. Either way, let's read on.
21. Verse 8: Hezekiah had asked Isaiah, "What will be the sign that the LORD will heal me and that I will go up to the temple of the LORD on the third day from now?"
- a) Apparently, the king didn't trust in the fig treatment to make a permanent difference. He was thinking about Isaiah's words that he would be well enough to go to the Temple in 3 days time. Therefore, he asked Isaiah to give him a sign from God. Isaiah responded:
22. Verse 9: Isaiah answered, "This is the LORD's sign to you that the LORD will do what he has promised: Shall the shadow go forward ten steps, or shall it go back ten steps?" <sup>10</sup> "It is a simple matter for the shadow to go forward ten steps," said Hezekiah. "Rather, have it go back ten steps." <sup>11</sup> Then the prophet Isaiah called upon the LORD, and the LORD made the shadow go back the ten steps it had gone down on the stairway of Ahaz.
- a) I have to admit, when it comes to the issue of miracles, the question of how God actually performs a miracle always bored me. That's because I figure if God is God, He can do whatever He wants when He wants. The question for us is not how He did it, but why He did it and what does God want us to learn from that story.
- b) With that point made, we have a famous little story here of King Hezekiah asking God for proof that He will cure the king. We get an interesting little miracle based on watching a sundial. Apparently there was a stairway that goes back to the days of King Ahaz. One could tell the time of the day using that stairwell as a sundial. The king was told by Isaiah that the shadow would mysteriously move back 10 steps. Somehow it did. Whether God actually changed the rotation of the sun here, or do something with light reflection so that the shadow of the stairwell moved back, is basically God's business how He did it.
- i) Let me put it this way, one of the most basic principals that I have always believed in is, "There is a God and I am not Him." That just means many things that God does that are beyond explanation and this is one of them.

- c) The point for you and me to learn here is that God is in charge. If it was God's will for the king to die, God could have made it so. However, God wanted to teach us the power of prayer and the consequences of asking for our will versus His will. God granted the king's request for more time and now was willing to do a miracle to show that He is a God of his word and despite the consequences, prove He does what He'll say He does.
- d) With the miracle done, and Hezekiah recovering it's time to move on to another story.
23. Verse 12: At that time Merodach-Baladan son of Baladan king of Babylon sent Hezekiah letters and a gift, because he had heard of Hezekiah's illness. <sup>13</sup> Hezekiah received the messengers and showed them all that was in his storehouses--the silver, the gold, the spices and the fine oil--his armory and everything found among his treasures. There was nothing in his palace or in all his kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them.
- a) A little bit of history would help here. Remember that Babylon is part of Iraq today and the Assyrian Empire is based out of what is Iran today. My point is wars between those who are associated with Iran and Iraq goes back thousands of years. My point is at that time, Babylon was also rebelling against the Assyrian Empire and Babylon would become themselves the next great empire about one hundred years from now. What I suspect is that since Hezekiah had survived the Assyrian Empire attack (remember the 185,000 dead soldiers?) word got out that it was possible to survive without that empire. Given all of that, the Babylonians sent a "heard you are all better gift" to Hezekiah. While the envoy was in town, Hezekiah showed these messengers all the treasures of that kingdom.
- b) Here's the big question: Should the king know it was wrong to show off all of the gold he had in his possession? Should the king have realized that the kingdom of Babylonia was going to be a threat to him at this time? Here's a clue: the king should have been aware that this foreign king had also rebelled against the Assyrians. He also should have known that this is a group that doesn't trust in God. Either way, Hezekiah should have just said thanks for the "get better gift" and send them on their way. My proof is the next verse.
24. Verse 14: Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah and asked, "What did those men say, and where did they come from?" "From a distant land," Hezekiah replied. "They came from Babylon." <sup>15</sup> The prophet asked, "What did they see in your palace?" "They saw everything in my palace," Hezekiah said. "There is nothing among my treasures that I did not show them."
- a) Short version is that Isaiah knew that the king showed the Babylonian messengers how much treasure the king had and possibly how much the king had for weapons. The point is to see that Hezekiah was bragging about what he owned as opposed to how much God had given him or how God was protecting him. Bottom line: Bad decision.
25. Verse 16: Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD: <sup>17</sup>The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the LORD. <sup>18</sup> And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood, that will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."
- a) It is interesting to consider that if one studies the life of the prophet Isaiah, he lived and died before the Babylonians ever rose to power and conquered much of that surrounding world including Jerusalem. It would be like us predicting a small country that has never conquered anyone rise to be a great power. The point is that Isaiah was correctly saying that something bad is going to happen in the future based on what the king did here.
- b) Before I go on, stop and think if you've just been told you have exactly 15 more years to live. How would you use them? Would you care about the future beyond those 15 years or just try to cram as much say, traveling or fun in those 15 years that you could? What we will read of King Hezekiah in the last few verses was in effect, "Who cares about the future beyond the 15 years I have left. I've only got that time, so let me enjoy the time that God has so graciously given me and not worry about what may happen beyond that." Yes Israel will suffer for that decision just as we suffer when we don't use our time for God.

26. Verse 19: "The word of the LORD you have spoken is good," Hezekiah replied. For he thought, "Will there not be peace and security in my lifetime?"
- a) John's loose translation: Who cares about life beyond when I live? Let's just live for today and not care about tomorrow. I've only got 15 years left and I'm going to enjoy them.
  - b) To state the obvious, there are eternal consequences for thinking this way, let alone the problems being created for the future. The next king to reign after Hezekiah was born in this 15 year time span and turned out to be the worst king Israel had and started the spiral that lead to the fall of that kingdom. However, that is the next lesson. Two verses left:
27. Verse 20: As for the other events of Hezekiah's reign, all his achievements and how he made the pool and the tunnel by which he brought water into the city, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah? <sup>21</sup> Hezekiah rested with his fathers. And Manasseh his son succeeded him as king.
- a) There is an expression that summarizes the difference between the book of "Kings" and the book of "Chronicles": Kings describes the accomplishments of the Israelite kings from their perspective and Chronicles describes the life of the kings from God's perspective. To state what is obvious by now, both are intended for us to study and learn and that is why both are part of the bible. I state that here as Kings also mentions another thing Hezekiah accomplished: He had a tunnel dug under the city wall that brought water from a nearby spring into that city. That tunnel still exists today and one can visit it in Jerusalem. It's an engineering accomplishment worth visiting if one is there. Why? Remember the threat of the Assyrian army? This is how the Israelites still got water before that army surrounded the city. My point is it served a survival purpose beyond being a big water pipe.
  - b) Bottom line is Hezekiah got his 15 more years. He survived the attack from the Assyrians, and he saw the birth of his son Manasseh during this time. Those 15 years were a time of miracles as well as a failure to trust God with His life.
28. All of that leads me back to my introduction: If this king failed to let God guide His life and did what he wanted, why is Hezekiah thought of as such a good king? While you're at it, tell us why we should care about him too? (and make it quick as your running long).
- a) Stop and consider what God desires of us more than anything else: A relationship with Him. It's not a matter of being "good enough" for God. All of us sin, just as Hezekiah did sin and make lots of mistakes in his lifetime that affected the people around him as well as the people who came after him. Hezekiah was considered a good king as he sought God to guide His life. Yes he made mistakes, but I'm convinced that Hezekiah is saved, not because he is a good person, but because of His trust that God is in control of all things and He wants to use our lives for His glory.
29. With that said, let me close in prayer: Father, we don't know whether or not you will work great miracles in our lives like wiping out a large army or adjusting time. All we do know is that you give us an unknown limited amount of time to live and the greatest thing we can do with that time is use it for Your glory. Yes we have lives to live and issues to deal with. Guide us through whatever it is we have to deal with and help us to remember that You are there through all of the things that our on our minds right now. Help us to rely upon Your power and not our willpower as we do live to make a difference for You in this world. We ask this in Jesus name, amen.