

1. Ever have one of those moments where you look back and realize that you've really blew it? The main character in these chapters had that type of moment. We're starting the third of a 4-chapter section where Isaiah is giving us some "palace politics". If you recall, the last two chapters talked about what how the Israelite (Southern Kingdom of Judah) faced extermination as a foreign army was at the door demanding their surrender. Chapter 37 ended with God doing a great miracle as a single angel destroyed that foreign army as they surrounded that city. That had to be a glorious moment in Israel's history where we can see God working on a grand scale.
2. From here, the author Isaiah goes back a few years to tell us how the king there made some really bad decisions that'll eventually ruin that kingdom. So why backtrack to give us all that bad news right after all this good news? First, it's to realize that actions have consequences even though we see God working and guiding our lives. Yes I believe God knows all things and the text here will make that abundantly clear. However, just because He knows everything, does not mean we can avoid accountability for our mistakes. The way I view life is I'm eternally saved because I believe that Jesus is God and He died for every sin I've ever committed or ever will commit. How I then live based on that knowledge affects the amount of time I get to live as a witness for Him and I'm also positive God will reward us eternally based on our faithfulness to Him as a witness for Him.
3. I bring that up here, because Isaiah will backtrack in these chapters to events that occurred about 10-15 years prior to the events of the last two chapters. I believe what God wants us to see here in these two chapters is that despite the mistakes we make, He'll still go on with His eternal plan for our live. When we make the mistake of only focusing on "Me, myself and I" we do suffer for it, as we are no longer thinking about what God desires for us and His people as a whole. Therefore as we read about these events that took place in Israel about 2,700 years ago, the issue isn't so much about "them" as it is to realize despite the fact we're eternally saved, there are consequences we'll face for decisions we make in life that are not His will.
4. Let me explain the text of this chapter, as that may help. Isaiah tells the king while he's suffering from an illness that God said he's going to die from that illness. Doing some calculations based on similar text in 2nd Kings and 2nd Chronicles, King Hezekiah was 39 when he almost died here. It is about ten years prior to the great destruction of the Assyrian army that ended the last chapter.
  - a) In this chapter the king prayed to God to live longer, and God gave him 15 more years.
  - b) During that 15-year time, the king had a son, who went on to be one of the worst kings in the history of that country. That king was so bad, God effectively said, "I'm going to wipe out the Southern Kingdom because you failed to learn from history when I just saved you during the time of King Hezekiah."
  - c) Also during that 15-year time, Hezekiah met with the king of Babylon. That foreign king made an unsuccessful attempt to break away from the Assyrian Empire. Later that king would influence Babylon to successfully break away. My point is because Hezekiah did show the Babylonian king all of Israel's treasures, it influenced Babylon to want to attack Israel during the time it was on the rise forming it's own empire.
  - d) My point is God agreed to give the king 15 more years to live after that illness, but he had to live with the mistakes he made during that time. Yes God still wiped out the Assyrian army as stated in the last chapter, but the Israelites still had to live with the bad decisions the king made during that 15 year time extension that God gave him.
  - e) So if God through Isaiah said, "You're going to die now", does that mean God can change His mind? The way I view it is God knows all things. Because God knew Hezekiah was going to pray about this and because God knew how He wants history to play out, it was always His plan to give King Hezekiah 15 more years. It'd be like saying, "Unless you're willing to change your ways, that's it for you. Since you were willing to seek Me for help, I'll give you more time despite the consequences of that extra time."

5. Since I'm discussing one of my favorite topics: time, let me discuss those extra 15 years Hezekiah got for moment. I recently had a short discussion with my mom about time. I told her that I like to live every day as if it was my last. She asked me in effect why live that way? What I told her is what many people have figured out: The best way to live a life of joy is to treat every day as if it's your last. I'm not saying to spend every dollar you have. I'm saying one should appreciate every day we have as if it's the last one we'll ever get because we never know for sure when is our last.
- a) I say that here because I think when King Hezekiah got his extra fifteen years, I doubt that he'd question God again or ask for more time as through his success and failure as a king, he must have realized that God's will is the best for his life.
  - b) Believe it or not, that leads me to this week's title which I got while listening to a sermon on these chapters by Jon Curson: God's perfect will versus God's permissive will.
  - c) The point is God's perfect will was for the king to accept his death the first time around as it would have been the best thing in the long run for the nation of Israel. That way his son who was born during those 15 years never would have ruled and it could have delayed or avoided the Babylonian destruction. Scholars believe it was that bad next king: Manasseh who was responsible for Isaiah's death. All I'm saying is when we're willing to accept His perfect will for our lives, it goes much better than when were willing to only settle for His permissive will, which is what we get in these two chapters.
  - d) Therefore, as we read the results of God's permissive will in these two chapters, consider the decisions we each make in life when we settle of His permissive will versus whatever is His perfect desire for our lives.
  - e) By the way, Chapter 40 next week, is a major "change of tone" that's really good news, but we'll get to that in the next lesson. In the meantime time for the verse-by-verse comments:
6. Chapter 38 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) Let's start with the phrase "in those days". Isaiah wanted to include that so that the reader is aware that the events of Chapter 38 happened prior to the events of Chapter 37. Isaiah's point is that God performed a great miracle in King Hezekiah's life years prior to the great miracle of the army being destroyed a few verses prior to this one. So why can't Isaiah put the text in order of the events? I believe it's to show King Hezekiah's lack of confidence in God prior to the great miracles he did.
    - i) Let me explain that better: In the previous chapter, Hezekiah along with and all of those living in Jerusalem were scared for their lives as a large army surrounded all of them and we're threatening their lives. The text of the last chapter ended with a great miracle of God destroying that army in one night. Now we're backtracking to show us that the king was told all of this would happen years earlier.
    - ii) It's like one of those moments when we're reminded, "Hey, remember a long time ago, I told you this was going to happen? Well, here's that reminder.
    - iii) I think Isaiah tells it this way to remind us that God keeps His promises to us even when we forget about His promises.
    - iv) One of the things I am grateful about God is the fact He's incapable of lying. If He could lie or go back on His word, we can't trust Him. If that's true, what about the text here where it says the king was going to die years earlier? That's the example of God's "perfect will" versus His "permissive" will. It'd be like telling a child that my desire for you is to do this. However, if you really want to do "that" instead, I will permit it, even though it's really my desire for you to do "this" instead.
  - b) Anyway, I'm jumping ahead of the text. The point is years prior to the king witnessing this great miracle of the army surrounding Jerusalem being destroyed, the king was sick to the point of dying. Isaiah, mentioned by his full name in this verse had the privilege of coming to see the king in this condition. Isaiah said in effect, you won't recover from this.

7. 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) A problem with being a leader is privacy is rarely an option. The President's wife referred to her life as being in a really nice prison because people are always around you as you go through your life. My point is for the Israelite king to have a sense of privacy, he turns his back on whoever is there and prays. Because Isaiah was right next to the king at this time, I believe Isaiah heard this prayer and probably recorded it as he remembered it.
  - b) It's interesting to contrast the king's prayer in the previous chapter with this one. Recall in the last chapter, the king got a letter from the King of the Assyrian empire saying how the Israelites had to surrender. Hezekiah took that letter to God and effectively said, "Look at what your enemies are saying about you." Here in this prayer, it's "Me, myself and I". My point is the last prayer was all about what's best for God's people. This prayer is all about what's best for "me". In both cases God answered those prayers. However, I'm convinced that the answered prayer of the last chapter was better, as it benefited all of God's people. In this chapter, it's all about the king himself. Again, I sort of see this like giving in to our children so they stop begging us for something else. It's not our perfect will, but we give them what they want as we're tired of listening to them beg for their will so we do permit what they want here. That's the type of scenario being played out here.
  - c) Speaking of "Me myself and I", notice the tone of these verses. It's like the king saying, "I have been a good boy. I do Your will and I trust in You. Now do this for me (let me live through this illness) so I can continue to serve You." Notice the tone of "what I can do for you" in these verses. It's thinking in terms of "God needs us".
  - d) My point is we can ask anything we want of God, but we should approach Him based on what is His will, not based on how good we are. We don't have to earn His love or prove our worth to Him. As I stated in the introduction, and as we'll read in these two chapters, the mistakes the king made since the time of this sickness until when he died ended up to be the "death nail" for the Southern Kingdom. If there is one lesson to get out of this text, it is that we should always desire God's perfect will for our lives, even if that will is costly to our own lives or our own health and happiness. However, I am jumping ahead of this story, so let's get back to the text.
8. Verse 4: Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: <sup>5</sup> "Go and tell Hezekiah, `This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life. <sup>6</sup> And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city.
- a) I have to admit sometimes I am overly fascinated by strange little details. Notice that the text says, "Go and tell Hezekiah". That means that God didn't make it obvious to Isaiah of the fate of the king right when the king was praying for more life. I'm not saying God did need time to think about the king's prayer. I think it's more like God thinking, I wish that the king would focus on what's best for His people as opposed to what's best for him, but if that's what the king wants, I'll permit it so that the Israelites will eventually see what it is he prayed for will put the "wheels in motion" that lead to Jerusalem's destruction.
  - b) So if God knew that Hezekiah would have a horrible son during that 15-year period, why did He allow this king to live longer? I think it's so we can realize there are consequences to what we desire. You know the old expression, "be careful what you wish for?" That is what we're seeing played out here in this text.
  - c) One also see this from the perspective of how much God loves us. It's kind of like if God said us, "I know what's best for all of you. That's why I gave you all My laws as to guide how you should live your life." However, to prove to us that God will at times allow His "permissive will", He'll also allow us to make bad choices as that's often the best way we can learn how He wants us to live as a witness for Him.

- d) I have to admit if I was told, "15 more years", my first thought might be, "is that it? Take it from someone whose lived awhile, 15 years goes by quickly. Talk to older people and ask them how fast life goes by and you'll see how "nothing" 15 years is. I think that Hezekiah didn't want to push God so he thought, "I get 15 more years, it's better than dying now, so I'll take it and not complain about His decision."
  - e) A quick note about Israel's history after Hezekiah: The son born to him during that period (named Manasseh ) who was considered the worst king in the history of that country. I'm wondering if Manasseh resented God for taking his father away from him as a young age, did it cause the son to turn from God? Don't know. All I know is was a horrible king that according to tradition had Isaiah killed as he didn't want him to preach on God's behalf.
  - f) As I also stated in the introduction, there is a positive side of knowing that you only have a specified period to live. If you talk to people dying of cancer, many of them with strong faith have a positive attitude despite the pain. That's because they know about eternity as taught in the bible and trusted God enough through that pain. I watched several relatives of mine who were strong Christians and died painful deaths due to cancer, yet despite all of that pain, were generally joyful until the end and made the most of the time they had.
  - g) My point is one needs to appreciate the time God's given us to live. We should never take it lightly as we never know when God's going to call us home. We can be joyful in despite of what we have to deal with in life. As the old saying goes, "You can't always choose our circumstances, but we can always choose our attitude as we go through it." That's how to have joy no matter what we're dealing with.
  - h) Speaking of good news and perspective, God not only tells the king he's going to live after this illness is gone, but he will also deliver the city from the Assyrians. Isaiah gives us the fact that God doing this as if He's saying, "Since I'm talking to you anyway (Hezekiah), let Me tell you what else I'm going to do, which is stop the Assyrian army." I wonder if that's why Isaiah added this chapter after the last one. It's as if Isaiah saw God wipe out all that army in one moment and think, "Wait a minute, I remember God saying this to Hezekiah many years ago back when he was really sick." Maybe that's why we get this chapter out of sequence of events. It's speculation, but it fits the pattern here.
  - i) When one is really sick, all one tends to think about is, "When am I going to recover from this sickness?" I sort of see the king reacting that way. It's like, "Hey God, you're going to also stop the Assyrians too? Great, I can deal with that once I'm better and I thank you for the extra 15 years, but right now all I want is for this fever to end and get back up again!" However, while Hezekiah's focusing on his own problems, God's focusing on His will for all His people by giving more details about the miracle of destroying a large army.
9. Verse 7: " `This is the LORD's sign to you that the LORD will do what he has promised: <sup>8</sup> I will make the shadow cast by the sun go back the ten steps it has gone down on the stairway of Ahaz.' " So the sunlight went back the ten steps it had gone down.
- a) Here we have another miracle that can't be explained in human terms. I don't know if the king had some big sundial around the palace, but text implies that Hezekiah's father built some sort of stairway where one could observe how the sun moved. However it was, it is an obvious place so the king could observe this miracle happening.
  - b) As my regular's know, I believe if "God is God" He can do anything at anytime. I have no idea how this miracle worked. I don't know if was a planet wide issue or something local. I've read speculations of a close "fly by" of another planet that caused the earth to shift, so it would appear the sun did go backwards. However it occurred, I accept that it did and it's as much a part of history as any other historical fact. Does that miracle affect you and me? Only in the sense that we have to accept the idea that God is in charge, and if it is His will to change how "things" work, who are we to complain?
  - c) However, the king didn't seem to care too much about this as he was happier that he got to live longer as based on the text of the next several verses. Speaking of which:

10. Verse 9: A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah after his illness and recovery:
- a) Notice that the next few verses were not technically written by Isaiah, but by Hezekiah. It is included here to show us the dangers of only focusing on "Me myself and I" as opposed to focusing on what's best for God's people. My point is as we read this prayer, realize it's more bad than good as it only focuses on Hezekiah himself and not what He promised He would do to save Jerusalem from the foreign army currently in Israel!
11. Verse 10: I said, "In the prime of my life must I go through the gates of death and be robbed of the rest of my years?" <sup>11</sup> I said, "I will not again see the LORD, the LORD, in the land of the living; no longer will I look on mankind, or be with those who now dwell in this world.
- a) Let me talk for a second about the disease that Hezekiah had. The text coming up later in the chapter said he had a boil. What that means is he probably had a high fever due to his body fighting whatever that damage the boil is causing. There was no aspirin back then. A high fever could mean the death of anyone. The most likely speculation is that the king was probably 39 when he got this boil. Now, here is where the king is describing how he recovered. I suspect he wrote down this prayer, which is how Isaiah got a hold of it.
  - b) I could give some technical background on the Jewish word for "death" as it's used here. I could also tell you in the original Hebrew the word "LORD" is God's most holy name. It's repeated twice for emphasis. The important point here is the king is grateful, as he didn't have to die at that point. Did King Hezekiah think he was saved? Sure. He desires at this point to live longer so he can glorify God with more time. So is it wrong to ask God for a longer life? Of course not. Again, the issue is His permissive will versus His perfect will.
  - c) Most of us who've lived a while, have seen people die horrible deaths due to cancer. We may also seen a few miracles where we can't explain how God allowed one person to live through it. The issue is about accepting His will and giving Him praise when He chooses for whatever reason to allow His will to occur that way.
  - d) To make it short, the king's in a good mood as he gets to live longer. I suspect that when the king's happy, everyone's happy! Meanwhile, back to the prayer itself:
12. Verse 12: Like a shepherd's tent my house has been pulled down and taken from me. Like a weaver I have rolled up my life, and he has cut me off from the loom; day and night you made an end of me. <sup>13</sup> I waited patiently till dawn, but like a lion he broke all my bones; day and night you made an end of me. <sup>14</sup> I cried like a swift or thrush, I moaned like a mourning dove. My eyes grew weak as I looked to the heavens. I am troubled; O Lord, come to my aid!"
- a) I can sum up these three verses with the phrase "Woe is me". The time I find that most of us focus on ourselves is when we are really sick or in a lot of physical pain. That is when we tend to only focus on ourselves. I remember reading a book years ago about a pastor who had to suffer in bed for a long time in a lot of pain. He spent most of his life being a big help for others, but when he needed to be ministered to, it was very difficult for him to let others minister to him. The point here is the way God wants us to get through life is not only to help others, but let others help us. That help and our trust in God will help us get through the worst of pain.
  - b) I want you to keep that thought in mind as we go through these verses. Here's the king of the Southern Kingdom of Israel obviously in a lot of pain and facing the prospect of death. Instead of stating what he's grateful for, he's complaining about how his life's now coming to an end. You can sense how this king is blaming God for ending his life at this time. He is comparing his life to a victim of a lion whose life was suddenly ended. He complains to God for help and desires his life to be extended.
  - c) OK, so if this prayer is so bad, why did Isaiah include it? For one reason's to show us that even when we're having our own pity parties, God cares about us so much He's willing to help us through our tough times. Again the issue is His permissive versus only giving us His perfect will. So if we're having our own pity parties, does that mean God's obligated to help us? Of course not. Our job is also to figure out His will and live accordingly.

- d) Let me put it this way, the only thing God is obligated to do is what He unconditionally promised us: To give eternal life to those of us who trust Jesus is God and died for every sin we'll ever commit. Over and about that, is His business. We can ask for Him to help us in any situation, but He never promises us say a 100-year lifespan. He asks that we do be a good witness for Him and I'm convinced we're somehow rewarded for being a good witness for Him based on how we've made that difference. That too is a promise God has made for those who've committed their lives to serving Him.
  - e) Suppose we sort of know all of that, what should we do when we're really hurting like the king is in this situation? First, of course we should get whatever medical help we can. We should ask for His help, but we also have to remember He's under no obligation to extend our life beyond what length of time He has planned for us. We should make the most of whatever time God's given us because we never know when that time is going to end.
  - f) My point is instead of this king saying "woe is me" in this little speech, it would have been better for that king to pray, "Heavenly Father, despite what I'm dealing with, praise Your name and continue to make a difference in the lives of those you have called to make that difference for You. You are well aware of what I'm dealing with and if it's Your will, I ask You to help me through my pain, help me to accept other's help and take whatever steps are necessary in order to remedy, that situation." With that positive thought in mind let's look at the next verse as the king realized he was throwing himself a "pity party" here.
13. Verse 15: But what can I say? He has spoken to me, and he himself has done this. I will walk humbly all my years because of this anguish of my soul.
- a) One of the reason God asks us to keep on praying over a situation is often longer prayers will get us to see life from His perspective. It's almost as if King Hezekiah realized he did need to change his focus here. I find that in order to help people, first we have to let them vent about their sorrow before we can help them. I think that's what the king was doing here. The last few verses were him venting his frustration out to God. I see God thinking in the last few verses, "Hey, don't you think realize I know what you're going through?"
  - b) That's why here in Verse 15, we sort of see Hezekiah accept his fate as he now realizes the fact that God has allowed that sickness to occur. The text mentions how the king realizes he has to humble himself to make God the center of his life even to ask for help.
  - c) That's what Isaiah included this prayer in his book. He wanted us to see that even if we're rich and famous like this king, we should humble ourselves before God if we accept who He is and desire His help. Again, God's not obligated to help Isaiah here, God only did so in the same way we may give in to our children's request out of our love for them, but we still realize it's not our "perfect" will for them.
14. Verse 16: Lord, by such things men live; and my spirit finds life in them too. You restored me to health and let me live. <sup>17</sup> Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction; you have put all my sins behind your back.
- a) Notice in Verse 16, that Hezekiah wrote this "past tense". The text says, "You restored me" so we know he said all of this after he recovered and thought back on all he went through. I personally suspect because he was the king, he either hand wrote out this prayer or had it dictated which is why Isaiah got a hold of this prayer so he could include it in his book.
  - b) Now that I've speculated how Isaiah knew all of this, let's get back to the prayer itself. In Verse 16, we see Hezekiah get his focus off himself and we can see how he finds gratitude for other believers as well. It's almost as if the king is thinking, "Now that my head's clear from all of that sickness, I can see how others have helped me and I'm grateful for all the other believers who helped me through this time. By the way, as we'll discover shortly, it was Isaiah among those who ministered to the king.
  - c) Notice the king says, "By such things men live". What are those things? In context, I'd say the king acknowledges that God exists and He rules over the affairs of mankind. Notice it next says, "my spirit finds life in them too". That means the king acknowledges all of this.

- d) Let me explain all of this a little better: Once we realize that God exists and we can realize how He works in our world, we start to see life differently. The fact that we're aware that we only have a limited time to live here makes us more aware of our surroundings as we want to make the best of the time we have to live. With King Hezekiah now aware that he only has 15 years left to live, I suspect he wants to make the best of it. I admit, that when I think that I only have an unknown but limited time to live in this world, I make better use of my time. Yes of course I have to do what's necessary to live, but the realization that our time is limited, makes me want to use what time I have left wisely. It should make us look around and think, how can I best use my time for God's glory? Anyway, I think the king's having one of those moments where he realizes his time is limited and wants to make the best of it. That's what he's talking about in these verses.
  - e) That leads me back to these verses: The king realized it was for his own benefit that God allowed him to suffer to the point of almost dying. The king also realized that He forgave him of all his sins. I'm convinced we'll meet Hezekiah in heaven one day because he states that revelation and believed in it despite whatever sins he committed.
  - f) I have to admit looking back at the times I was sick I never thought of those times as being God "ordained". Does that mean He ordains every cold we get or horrible disease? I can't explain all sickness. I just know we can feel sorry for ourselves or we can praise God that we can realize He's working in our lives despite whatever we have to deal with. That's the idea behind these verses. It's all about our attitude. Yes we have to deal with things and I am not denying that fact. All I'm saying is we can either feel sorry for ourselves or we can praise God for the time He's given us to live and make the best of the time we have. That's what I see the king realizing here in these verses. Since he's in such a good mood here, let us read the rest of what he realized:
15. Verse 18: For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness.
- a) Since Hezekiah brings up death and the grave here, I figured this is a good time to realize what the next life is like for the believer and the unbeliever. Hell is where people are sent who don't want God to rule over their lives. All people sin, but those who refuse to trust in the God who created us in the first place for His forgiveness and guidance will get their desire for eternity. I believe it was C.S. Lewis who half jokingly said, "Hell will be locked from the inside" in that it's a world for people who don't want God to be in charge of their lives. Let me explain all of this another way: Do I believe we'll be singing praises to God in heaven? Of course. One of the fascinating bits of bible trivia is that no references exist in the bible to angels singing. Maybe they do, but it's not stated anywhere. On that idea, many bible scholars argue that the privilege of singing praises to God is reserved for those of us who do believe in God and want to praise Him for eternity.
  - b) That idea leads me back to the concept of hell. The "grave doesn't sing praises to God" is a reminder that people who don't want God to rule over their lives won't sing any praise to Him either in this life or in the next one. The point is people who refuse use some of their time to make a difference for God will continue that way for eternity. Yes I believe hell is a place of eternal suffering, but much of that suffering comes from the realization of how one's life is wasted if one only uses it to glorify themselves and not the God who made us in the first place.
  - c) The point is Hezekiah is in his own way, praising God not only for giving him more time to live, but more time to glorify God with the time he has left to live.
16. Verse 19: The living, the living--they praise you, as I am doing today; fathers tell their children about your faithfulness.
- a) I've never believed in the false concept of annihilation. That's the idea that when we die, we no longer are conscious and we simply stop existing. The bible is very clear that we'll all live forever. That's one reason why we're encouraged to tell others of His faithfulness.

- b) Let me explain this a little better: I like the analogy of computer software and hardware: If I had a blank computer disk and put it on a scale, it would weigh a few ounces. If that same disk were filled with "computer code" or even music, that disk would have the exact same weight. Computers have "weight". What we write and put on that computer has no weight. That's the difference between hardware, like a computer disk and software, what we write on the computer. My point is the "real you" is like software. When we die we'll be transferred to a "new body" that contains the software and we will live forever either in the presence of God or away from His presence.
  - c) So how do we know for sure all of this is true? Great question. That is why about thirty percent of the bible is predictions about the future. It's to prove to us that the bible as we know it came from outside of "time". It's God's way of communicating to us that all this is real and we're not wasting our time studying His word.
  - d) OK, I know I'm "preaching to the choir" here, as most of us reading this already accept the idea of God existing and we'll be with Him forever. The point as it ties to this verse is that we need to mentally remember not to waste the time God gives us so we don't waste it all on frivolous things, but we also use some of it to teach others about Him and be a witness to people around us.
  - e) It never ceases to amaze me that when I get together with my extended family I'm the one called on to pray. I found that most of the Christians I talk to in church about this express a similar feeling that they're considered the religious one in gatherings with nonbelievers. That's when we hear statements like, "You pray as you're better at it than we are" or "you are good at doing that, so you do it." A good prayer life comes from good practice of that lifestyle. The point is as it relates to this verse is Hezekiah realizes that the main purpose of life is to use it to make a difference for God. Just as we maybe called the "religious one" in gatherings, so we should use our lives to praise Him and be willing to lead others in a situation to praise to Him as well.
  - f) Before I move on, it's important to state that we don't have to do anything "fancy" in order to be a witness for God. The verse talks about telling our children about God. We can be a witness in whatever situation we're in at the moment. That's why I used the example of a time of prayer with nonbelievers. The point is we never know how and when we'll be of use to Him in whatever situation we're in. That's why I'm beating this point to death as I "preach to the choir" here.
  - g) In the meantime, king Hezekiah only has one more verse of praise to go here:
17. Verse 20: The LORD will save me, and we will sing with stringed instruments all the days of our lives in the temple of the LORD.
- a) You know that false image people have of heaven where we sit around all day playing a harp on a cloud? Some base that image on this verse. I'm pretty positive King Hezekiah is only talking about this life here. I also don't think it means that everybody in Jerusalem came to "church" with a harp in their hands. It's a colorful way of saying that singing was a big part of "church service" back then as it was today.
  - b) Notice the phrase "all the days of our lives". The idea is as long as we have to live and are able to praise God collectively as well as individually praise Him. That leads to the issue of why do we have to get together in some church setting to praise Him? Why can't it just be at home? The idea is to be a witness for Him and encourage others to be a witness for God as well. That's why God wants us to go to our local "Temple" to worship Him.
  - c) So is this verse also talking about heaven? It dawned on me many years ago, that I might as well get used to praising God now in a group setting because I'll be doing that forever. I never liked the idea of thinking, "I'll wait until I get to heaven to sing praises to God, as I don't want to do that stuff now." I figure whatever it is we want to do now, is what He'll allow us to do for eternity. If we don't want to be with Him now, we get that forever. If we want to sing to Him now, that idea will continue eternally.



- d) My point of all of this is God gives us what we want forever. If we want to be with Him, we have to get used to it as it'll be that way forever. As I stated earlier, the real us is like "software" that gets transferred to new "hardware" when we die. Therefore, the real us, which has no weight, can't die because like "software" it lives forever as long as there will be "hardware" to contain our "software". OK, no more "computer geek talk". The point is we'll live forever and the bible gives us enough proof of that fact and fear of the next life is not an issue of those who trust in God's perfect payment of all our sins. That's why there's so much proof of who Jesus is in the bible, so we can have assurance that we'll be around forever so we can praise Him not only in this life, but in the next one as well.
- e) So won't that get boring, just to sing praises to God forever? The bible doesn't spend a lot of time talking about what we do in the next life, as it's mostly a guide as to how we're to live this life. I just figured if God gives us "this much to do" in this life, I can't see the next one as being any less interesting. I'm not positive what we do for eternity, but since "joy" is what God wants to have, I'm positive the next life will be as joyful for believers.
- f) In the meantime, we still have 10 verses left to go:
18. Verse 21: Isaiah had said, "Prepare a poultice of figs and apply it to the boil, and he will recover."
- a) I have no idea if "figs" have any natural healing abilities to boils. I do know that fig trees are common in Israel so I suspect this is God saying, "Use what I created and what is there to make this better." Do I believe in doctors? Yes. Do I believe in natural remedies? Yes of course I do. A lot of what God created is made as remedies for all sorts of illnesses. It's still God doing the healing. He often works through doctors and through stuff we find in nature to be a remedy to what ill us.
- b) Let me put this verse another way: If all it takes is figs to cure a boil, why would we need God to help us through tough situations? I'm sure there were "doctor's" on the budget to help a king with an illness. However, having a godly person who knows what to apply to an illness is also a God-given gift. All I'm saying is that we trust in God to guide our lives but then we should never refuse medical help as God can work through such help so we'll be able to live as long as possible to make a difference for Him.
19. Verse 22: Hezekiah had asked, "What will be the sign that I will go up to the temple of the LORD?"
- a) I admit, this is a strange way to end a chapter, and I double-checked that I didn't forget to include any verses. I also checked the next chapter, and realized it's a different topic.
- b) What helps here is the word "had". This is "past tense". The king had wondered how he'd know that he'd recover from this illness so he could praise God in the future: That is why he got the medicine treatment as a sign he would recover. That's why he got the privilege of Isaiah personally telling the king he would recover. The chapter ends with a reminder that sometimes God will answer our prayers by making His will known to us. That does not mean we have to strain to hear God's voice. It just means we can look back at our life and see how God's been guiding us the whole time. Hezekiah could see that he recovered from this illness and realized that God was helping him the whole time. That fact was the sign that God helped him.
- c) With that said, remember that these two chapters are here to show us the danger of only focusing on ourselves. Yes we can realize the good things God's done for us, but we also have to think in terms of "community" in that God wants us to care about others. Part of being the king is that one has to focus his or her life on what's best for the people the king rules over.
- d) Let me explain this another way, before I move on to the short 8 verse chapter coming up. God created us so we can use our lives to be a witness to others. That's why the book of Revelation (1:6 5:10) refers to believers as "kings and priests". Our job is to lead others to God as if we were professional priests as kings in the sense that we're to care more about others than we do about ourselves. That's a way of describing us believers.

20. Chapter 39, Verse 1: At that time Merodach-Baladan son of Baladan king of Babylon sent Hezekiah letters and a gift, because he had heard of his illness and recovery. <sup>2</sup> Hezekiah received the envoys gladly and showed them what was in his storehouses--the silver, the gold, the spices, the fine oil, his entire 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) Like I said, Chapter 39 changes topics. Notice it starts with "At that time". That's the time when Hezekiah recovered from a disease and God said he has 15 more years to live. All I am saying is the events of Chapters 38 and 39 are "past tense" before the great event of the Assyrian army being wiped out outside of Jerusalem as stated at the end of Chapter 37.
  - b) With that said, we have a new character being introduced here. I won't try to pronounce that name, just copy and paste it here: Merodach-Baladan. The short version is this king was the king over the city of Babylon. He tried to lead a revolt against the Assyrians but lost that battle. (It may have been his father who revolted, but you get the idea.) Since he didn't like the Assyrians any more than those in Jerusalem did, the foreign king wanted to "make friends" with the Jewish king as if to say, "Hey, you and I are in this together as to stop being a part of the Assyrian Empire, so here's a get well gift for illness recovery.
  - c) At the time this occurred, Babylon was not a great empire, but just "a city". The time they grew to take over the Assyrian Empire and make it even larger was still many years away and occurred long after Isaiah and King Hezekiah lived.
  - d) Still, King Hezekiah was in a good mood as he just recovered from a sickness, and here is a bunch of visitors from a foreign country bringing a "get well" gift. So the king figured if these guys came all this way, let me show them all the treasures we have around here.
  - e) To state what become obvious a hundred years later, when the Babylonians started to be the "big kid on the block" as they took over much of the Assyrian Empire as well as made it even larger, they remembered that Israel had all sort of treasures based on this visit and it eventually lead to the Babylonians conquering Jerusalem.
  - f) So if we're called to be a good witness to God, aren't we supposed to show His "treasures" to those who are interested? No, we're supposed to tell others of His existence and how He rules over the world. We're to tell others of the best way to live our lives is to use it to make a difference for Him. The point is "what belongs to God, belongs to Him and not as a showpiece to encourage others to be believers". In other words, we don't come to Jesus for the "stuff", but because we need Him for our salvation.
  - g) As the old joke goes, Jesus did not die for our sins so we can have lots of fancy things. He is not a genie in a bottle to grant our every wish. We're here to do His will and that's it.
  - h) The great mistake King Hezekiah made was showing off "God's stuff" to encourage others to follow Him. Hezekiah had no idea that the Babylonians would destroy Israel one day, but the point is he made the mistake of trying to win people over to God, by a big pile of "God's stuff" as opposed to just explaining who He is and what He wants of us.
21. Verse 3: 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 to me from Babylon." <sup>4</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) Here we get the encounter between Isaiah and the king. At the least, these verses remind us that Isaiah had access to the king and could talk to him at times. That's how Isaiah was aware of the prayer of the last chapter and the encounter with the Babylonian leaders.
  - b) Remember what Isaiah knew about Babylon to this point. Isaiah already wrote Chapters 13-14 that discuss the inevitable destruction of Babylon. If you read my lesson on those 2 chapters, you might remember my title of "A tale of two cities", as a bible nickname is the tale of two cities as it often refers to events in both Jerusalem and Babylon. My point here is that I'm pretty sure Isaiah had enough biblical insight to know that Babylon will be bad news to Israel's future so Isaiah was mad that the king showed him all that stuff.

22. Verse 5: Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD Almighty: <sup>6</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>7</sup> And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood who will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."
- a) There was a popular movement in the 19th century to say that there must have been "two or three Isaiah's" as such scholar's can't accept the idea that Isaiah was aware of Babylon's plans to destroy Jerusalem at this time. As I stated back in my opening lesson on Isaiah, Jesus Himself effectively stated there was only one Isaiah. In the Gospel of John, Chapter 12, Jesus quotes from Isaiah 55 in John 12:38 and quoted from Isaiah 6 in John 12:40. Jesus said in John 12:39 in between those two quotes, "Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again." (Quoted from the New King James Version.)
  - b) Let me make this simple: Jesus Himself effectively said there was only one Isaiah. If you don't believe Jesus is God, you have much bigger problems than whether or not there was only one Isaiah. Since Jesus Himself said there was only one Isaiah, I accept the idea that he was given the privilege of knowing the future before it ever occurred. That's how here in these verses Isaiah could say as a matter of fact that one day, Babylon would take away everything in God's temple, even though that actual event didn't occur until roughly 100 years after this time.
  - c) Let me also show you how accurate this prediction is. Isaiah states here that some of the king's descendants will be taken away to be eunuchs in the Babylonian kingdom. Some suspect that Daniel himself was one of those eunuchs as there is no record of him having any children when he served as the king's "right hand man" during the reign of the most powerful king of Babylon. All I'm saying here is that Isaiah was "right on the money" as he stated that some of the king's descendants and top officials would be taken away to the city of Babylon, which is hundreds of miles away in what is today Iraq.
  - d) OK John, this is all neat ancient history. Let's say we believe all of this is true. How does any of it affect my life today? For starters, if we accept the accuracy of Isaiah's predictions that came true millenniums ago, shouldn't we also trust Isaiah's predictions about our life eternally? Shouldn't we accept the accuracy of Jesus returning to rule over the world as it is taught in this book? If you don't know, from the next lesson to the end of the book will change focus to be on the details of the events tying to Jesus First and Second Comings. In fact, we learn more about life in Jesus Second Coming from Isaiah than we do in the book of Revelation. Therefore, I ask you to stick around for the rest of these lessons as we'll be a part of that eternal destiny. That leads me back to the question of why should we care about all this stuff? The answer is, it's our destiny to enjoy as well as anyone else who do trust in God. That's why I argue every now and then that we will exist in more than three dimensions in the next life. That way all believers can get close to God as we'll rule with Him for all of eternity.
  - e) In the meantime we left Isaiah around 700 BC, correctly predicting that around 600BC, all the treasures of Jerusalem will be taken off to Babylon. That leads us to the final verse of this chapter and this section of Isaiah:
23. Verse 8: "The word of the LORD you have spoken is good," Hezekiah replied. For he thought, "There will be peace and security in my lifetime."
- a) Imagine a political leader being told, what you're doing will cause horrible damage in the future. The political leader then responds, "That's someone else's problem, as I don't have to worry about that in my lifetime." That's essentially how Hezekiah responds to Isaiah.
  - b) Obviously what we do now affects the future. What God expects of us is to care about the future of the world and not just think about our own lives. That's the great mistake we're reading about here in this final verse. That's the end of this two chapter warning of what will happen to us when we only think about what's best for ourselves.

- c) The good news is Isaiah will change focus from Chapter 40 onward. It's like he wants us to know that despite the mistakes the king made here, God will still go through with His plans to not only have "Him" pay the price for our sins, but also for Him to come and rule over the world despite the damage done to His people in order to try to prevent His plans for eternity to occur.
  - d) Realize that Satan is very aware that the bible is the Word of God. He knows He'll lose in the end and is doing all he can to delay that end from occurring. Why do you think all of the effort is made to destroy the Jewish people over the millenniums? Who do you think is behind all of that? Why have Christians been killed for their faith for millenniums? It is so the Gospel isn't spread to others. The point is Satan has no idea when he'll no longer be the ruler over this world, but he wants to delay that event as long as possible. That would be the most likely explanation of all the Jewish people murdered over the millenniums as well as all the Christians martyred for their faith.
    - i) That's why Isaiah wants to spend the rest of this book explaining the good news of what'll happen in spite of all that horror.
    - ii) That's why God calls on you and me to make a difference for Him by leading other people closer to Him so together we'll make that difference for Him until all of this will occur in the future. That's why the bible lays out so much of the future before it occurs so we'll recognize it when it happens.
    - iii) In the meantime, let's use the valuable time we have to make a difference for Him in the world around us. With that said, I'll close in prayer.
24. Heavenly Father, thank You for the valuable time You've given us. Help us like Hezekiah realize how blessed we are that we can use our time to praise You and make a difference for You in the world around us. Help us not to waste that time as we rely upon Your power so that we can do Your will. Make it obvious to us what is Your will as we use the gifts You've given us to make a difference for You. Thank You for the time we have and may it be used as You desire as we turn our will over to You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.