



Hezekiah was a king of Israel. Many of the kings of Israel worshipped idols and allowed the people to do the same. Hezekiah was a good king and enacted reforms that returned Israel and its temple to worship the Lord alone as true God. Hezekiah was also blessed as a good military leader for Israel. But later in life, he became ill and expected to die. This study examines Hezekiah's reaction to illness and how God dealt it.

2 Kings 20:1-11

20:1—What do you understand it to mean when God tells Hezekiah “Put your house in order”? What is King Hezekiah being told to do?

The phrase is a euphemism for preparing to die. Not only do we try to make sure all familial and financial arrangements are made but, more importantly, we make sure we are ready to meet our Creator, Savior, and Judge with hearts of faith. Hezekiah was told he would die.

20:2-3—How did King Hezekiah react to the news that he would soon die?

He prayed to the Lord, and he wept bitterly. He did not doubt what the Lord had told him.

20:3—What do you think about Hezekiah's prayer? Do you think you would say that if God told you that you were going to die?

Answers will vary, because the question asks what you think. But it seems that prayers for God's mercy would ask God to remember his greatness, not ours. But Hezekiah is not only praying for himself, he is also praying for the nation of Israel. He's asking God, for the sake of the people, to remember that he has served them well by leading them back to the Lord. In his prayer, he is asking God not only to give him what he wants, but he's also asking God to grant what is best for the people. In our prayers too, we pray for those who depend on us. Any illness in our lives also affects all of them.

20:4—How long does it take God to hear prayers?

Before Isaiah had left the inner courtyard of the king's palace, God had heard Hezekiah's prayer and was responding through his prophet, Isaiah.

20:5-6—God still hears prayers and often answers by granting healing. Consider the specificity of what God tells Hezekiah. “I will add fifteen years to your life.” If you or a loved one were given a terminal diagnosis, what would it mean to you to have the certainty of fifteen more years of life, and how would you react?

We love certainty and love being in control. For many, if we knew exactly how long our life would be, we would have a tendency to completely ignore God until the end. So, we don't know how long our life will be. Hezekiah is the king of God's people, and God lets him know what to plan on. Being granted fifteen more years of grace after receiving a terminal diagnosis would certainly be reason to rejoice. Hezekiah will not take those years for granted, rather he will live serving the Lord. We don't have the certainty of knowing when our life will end. We do have the certainty of knowing we will live forever. That is what God has told us. That, too, is reason to rejoice and live our lives serving the Lord because of the life he has given to us.

20:7—What did God do to treat and heal Hezekiah's illness?

Isaiah spoke on God's behalf and said, "Prepare a poultice of figs." It is interesting to note that God uses means to convey his blessing to Hezekiah (even though he simply could have healed him). God could have instantly and miraculously healed Hezekiah. Instead he tells him to make use of the medicinal qualities he has provided. Recognize medicine and medical practice as a big part of God's answer to our prayers for health and healing.

20:8-11—Hezekiah asked for a sign that the Lord would indeed heal him. What sign did he asked for?

Throughout the course of a day, the sun would cause the shadow to go forward ten steps. (The stairway of Ahaz led to the temple and were used as a sort of sundial.) Hezekiah asks for the shadow to miraculously do the opposite—to go backward ten steps. In Isaiah 7:10-14, Hezekiah's father, King Ahaz, is also offered a sign from God. In his arrogance, Ahaz did not believe the Lord's promise and scoffed at a sign. Hezekiah asked for a sign and believed it. And whether the Lord caused an illusion, a reflection, or a grand miracle, the shadow of the sun did the opposite of what it usually did as the Lord granted the sign.

Isaiah 38

38:10-14—What are some ways Hezekiah speaks about the tragedy of his impending early death?

He would not see the Lord again in the land of the living. The tent of his life has been pulled down. The fabric of his life has been rolled up and cut off from the loom on which it was woven. He has been attacked by a lion. His eyes were failing him.—He did not take this lightly, but was rather troubled by it.

38:15, 19-20—What does Hezekiah resolve to do the rest of his life?

He promises to walk humbly with the Lord, and he will praise the Lord all his life.

38:15-20— Apply what Hezekiah says in these verses and consider how your life might change if you faced death and then were promised fifteen more years of life.

Answers will vary.

38:16-17— Hezekiah acknowledges something very important about the suffering he has undergone—something that is vital for us to acknowledge too. What is that?

The Lord puts us through times of suffering to bless us. He does this because he loves us and wants to lead us to deeper repentance and faith. In the process he continually grants us his forgiveness.

Was Hezekiah afraid to die? What do you fear about death?

Answers will vary. Even if we're not afraid to die, we still might fear what will happen for those who depend on us, like Hezekiah did.

What do we learn from Hezekiah's illness?

Our times are in God's hands. Illness and health, times of trial and times of peace, even the number of our days are determined by God. He listens to our prayers, provides medicine for us to make use of, and promises life everlasting because of Jesus. Our terminal illness is sin. God doesn't tell us to apply a poultice of figs, he tells us to apply the cross to our sins and to apply the perfect righteousness of his Son to our account.

"The Lord will save me, and we will sing... all the days of our lives in the temple of the Lord."