

HEZEKIAH

Bitterness

II Chronicles 29-32

I. Introduction.

A. A Life Worthy of Notice.

Without a doubt, Hezekiah is one of the few truly great kings of Judah! The reforms he led brought the blessings of God on the entire nation. A surprising amount of space is devoted to his life and reign.

- II Kings 18-20
- II Chronicles 29-32
- Isaiah 36-39

For a while it almost seemed that a new David had arisen!

Hezekiah began to reign when he was twenty-five years old, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem...² And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done. (II Chron. 29:1-2)

B. Meanwhile, Up in the North.

Hezekiah's reign over the southern kingdom of Judah (about 715-686 BC) came just after the demise and disappearance of the ten northern tribes of Israel. The Assyrians had defeated Israel in 722 BC and took many of its inhabitants into exile. It is this disaster that serves as the backdrop for all that Hezekiah was seeking to accomplish in Judah. The data was clear: God is serious about covenant fidelity.

*¹⁶ And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers. Then this people will rise and whore after the foreign gods among them in the land that they are entering, and they will forsake me and break my covenant that I have made with them."¹⁷ Then my anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide my face from them, and they will be devoured. And many evils and troubles will come upon them, so that they will say in that day, "Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?""
(Deut. 31:16-17)*

Hezekiah was determined to do everything in his power to make sure such calamities never came upon Judah. His own father (King Ahaz) had been instrumental in leading Judah into apostasy and sin. Judgment could come to Jerusalem as well as to Samaria. The only hope was repentance, revival and reform.

With Hezekiah, Judah was being given yet another opportunity to return to God so that judgment could be averted and he could heal their land. The conditions for this to occur were no secret:

When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people,¹⁴ if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from

their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. ¹⁵ Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place. ¹⁶ For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that my name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will be there for all time. (II Chron. 7:13-16)

For purposes of this study, we will divide Hezekiah's life into three major periods.

1. Revival and Reform (II Chron. 29-31)
2. Deliverance from the Enemy (II Chron. 32:1-23)
3. A Chink in the Armor (II Chron. 32:24-33)

II. First Period: Revival and Reform (II Chron. 29-31).

There is great significance in the fact that the first official act of Hezekiah as the new king was to restore worship in God's Temple.

*In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he **opened the doors** of the house of the LORD and repaired them.... (II Chron. 29:3)*

Wicked King Ahaz (Hezekiah's father) had "shut up the doors" of the house of the Lord (II Chron. 28:24) a few years earlier. Hezekiah was determined to reverse the evil policies of his father and began his administration by restoring Temple worship.

There were several steps involved in leading the nation back to true worship:

A. Empower godly leaders.

Hezekiah knew that if revival and reform were ever going to come to God's people, it needed to begin with the spiritual leadership in the Temple. In former days, they had been part of the problem. Now, he wanted them to be leaders in a national revival.

*⁴ He brought in the priests and the Levites and assembled them in the square on the east ⁵ and said to them, 'Hear me, Levites! Now **consecrate yourselves**, and **consecrate the house** of the LORD, the God of your fathers, and carry out the filth from the Holy Place. ⁶ For our fathers have been unfaithful and have done what was evil in the sight of the LORD our God. They have forsaken him and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the LORD and turned their backs.... ⁸ Therefore the wrath of the LORD came on Judah and Jerusalem, and he has made them an object of horror, of astonishment, and of hissing, as you see with your own eyes.... ¹¹ My sons, do not now be negligent, for the LORD has **chosen you** to stand in his presence, to minister to him and to be his ministers and make offerings to him.' (II Chron. 29:4-11)*

B. Clean out the filth.

Revival, however, will be nothing more than a pious wish as long as wickedness remains unchallenged. **Repentance** is that act whereby the sin and unbelief that block the channels of grace are cleared away. This is why Hezekiah commanded the priests and Levites to "carry out the filth" from the Temple. (II Chron. 29:5)

¹⁵ They gathered their brothers and consecrated themselves and went in as the king had commanded, by the words of the LORD, to **cleanse the house of the LORD**.

¹⁶ The priests went into the inner part of the house of the LORD to cleanse it, and they brought out all the uncleanness that they found in the temple of the LORD into the court of the house of the LORD. And the Levites took it and carried it out to the brook Kidron.... ¹⁸ Then they went in to Hezekiah the king and said, "We have cleansed all the house of the LORD, the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and the table for the showbread and all its utensils. ¹⁹ All the utensils that King Ahaz discarded in his reign when he was faithless, we have made ready and consecrated, and behold, they are before the altar of the LORD." (II Chron. 29:15-19)

C. Offer **atonement for sin**.

But repentance only acknowledges the problem. Repentance alone can never save. Revival occurs only when a blood sacrifice makes **forgiveness** a glorious reality.

²⁰ Then Hezekiah the king rose early and gathered the officials of the city and went up to the house of the LORD. ²¹ And they brought seven bulls, seven rams, seven lambs, and seven male goats for a **sin offering** for the kingdom and for the sanctuary and for Judah. And he commanded the priests, the sons of Aaron, to offer them on the altar of the LORD. ²² So they slaughtered the bulls, and the priests received the blood and threw it against the altar. And they slaughtered the rams, and their blood was thrown against the altar. And they slaughtered the lambs, and their blood was thrown against the altar. ²³ Then the goats for the sin offering were brought to the king and the assembly, and they laid their hands on them. ²⁴ and the priests slaughtered them and made a sin offering with their blood on the altar, to make atonement for all Israel. For the king commanded that the burnt offering and the sin offering should be made for all Israel. (II Chron. 29:20-24)

D. Rediscover **joyful thanksgiving and praise**.

When worshippers discover the reality of their sins forgiven and their debt paid, the result is always joyous, heart-felt praise.

²⁵ And he stationed the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, harps, and lyres, according to the commandment of David and of Gad the king's seer and of Nathan the prophet, for the commandment was from the LORD through his prophets. ²⁶ The Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. ²⁷ Then Hezekiah commanded that the burnt offering be offered on the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the **song to the LORD** began also, and the trumpets, accompanied by the instruments of David king of Israel. ²⁸ The whole assembly worshiped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded. All this continued until the burnt offering was finished. ²⁹ When the offering was finished, the king and all who were present with him bowed themselves and worshiped. ³⁰ And Hezekiah the king and the officials commanded the Levites to sing praises to the LORD with the words of David and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with **gladness**, and they bowed down and worshiped. (II Chron. 29:25-30)

E. Reformation.

Real change, however, will never come to a nation from a great experience of God alone! It takes more than a few Spirit-filled worship services to bring about lasting transformation. For this to happen, we need more than revival. We need re-formation. Hezekiah began the move from revival to reformation when he re-established the Passover and when he instituted a program to organize the priests and Levites so that the work of God could be sustained and expanded.

1. The Passover restored.

With the proper foundation for worship now restored, Hezekiah invited all the tribes of Israel (including the northern tribes still in existence) to come to Jerusalem and celebrate the Passover. Though not everyone accepted the invitation, many did come to Jerusalem for the festival. For two solid weeks they celebrated the Passover. Not since the days of Solomon had Jerusalem seen a celebration like this!

⁵ So they decreed to make a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, that the people should come and keep the Passover to the LORD, the God of Israel, at Jerusalem, for they had not kept it as often as prescribed. ⁶ So couriers went throughout all Israel and Judah with letters from the king and his princes, as the king had commanded, saying, "O people of Israel, return to the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, that he may turn again to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria. ⁷ Do not be like your fathers and your brothers, who were faithless to the LORD God of their fathers, so that he made them a desolation, as you see. ⁸ Do not now be stiff-necked as your fathers were, but yield yourselves to the LORD and come to his sanctuary, which he has consecrated forever, and serve the LORD your God, that his fierce anger may turn away from you. ⁹ For if you return to the LORD, your brothers and your children will find compassion with their captors and return to this land. For the LORD your God is gracious and merciful and will not turn away his face from you, if you return to him." (II Chron. 30:1-9)

2. Organization of Priests and Levites.

For a work of God to be maintained and expanded, godly leaders are needed as well as a God-honoring structure/organization that enhances the ministry, not hinders it.

² And Hezekiah appointed the divisions of the priests and of the Levites, division by division, each according to his service, the priests and the Levites, for burnt offerings and peace offerings, to minister in the gates of the camp of the LORD and to give thanks and praise. (II Chron. 31:2)

Furthermore, Hezekiah made sure that the reforms had solid financial support. He modeled generosity in his own giving and challenged the people to do the same.

⁵ As soon as the command was spread abroad, the people of Israel gave in abundance the firstfruits of grain, wine, oil, honey, and of all the produce of the

field. And they brought in abundantly the tithe of everything....⁷ In the third month they began to pile up the heaps, and finished them in the seventh month.⁸ When Hezekiah and the princes came and saw the heaps, they blessed the LORD and his people Israel. (II Chron. 31:5-8)

III. Second Period: Deliverance from the Enemy (II Chron. 32:1-23).

A. The Assyrian attack.

After these things and these acts of faithfulness, Sennacherib king of Assyria came and invaded Judah and encamped against the fortified cities, thinking to win them for himself. (II Chron. 32:1)

Faithful obedience and godly living, however, do not make God's people **immune** from trials and suffering! The Assyrians had recently destroyed the northern nation of Israel and taken many into captivity and now they were threatening Judah. In response to the invasion, Hezekiah took all the precautions one would expect a king to take (see II Chron. 32:2-6). For example: he blocked up wells so the invaders had no water, he fortified the wall of Jerusalem, he made weapons and armed the soldiers, and he organized the army. He also encouraged the people with an inspiring speech:

*⁷ "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him, for there are **more with us** than with him.⁸ With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles." And the people took confidence from the words of Hezekiah king of Judah. (II Chron. 32:7-8)*

The invasion reached a new level of crisis, however, when a delegation from the Assyrian army came to Jerusalem and issued an ultimatum. The speech is a classic example of **psychological warfare** calculated to intimidate and break down resistance.

⁹ After this, Sennacherib king of Assyria, who was besieging Lachish with all his forces, sent his servants to Jerusalem to Hezekiah king of Judah and to all the people of Judah who were in Jerusalem, saying,¹⁰ "Thus says Sennacherib king of Assyria, 'On what are you trusting, that you endure the siege in Jerusalem?'¹¹ Is not Hezekiah misleading you, that he may give you over to die by famine and by thirst, when he tells you, 'The LORD our God will deliver us from the hand of the king of Assyria'?...¹³ Do you not know what I and my fathers have done to all the peoples of other lands? Were the gods of the nations of those lands at all able to deliver their lands out of my hand?¹⁴ Who among all the gods of those nations that my fathers devoted to destruction was able to deliver his people from my hand, that your God should be able to deliver you from my hand?¹⁵ Now, therefore, do not let Hezekiah deceive you or mislead you in this fashion, and do not believe him, for no god of any nation or kingdom has been able to deliver his people from my hand or from the hand of my fathers. How much less will your God deliver you out of my hand! "

*¹⁶ And his servants said still more against the LORD God and against his servant Hezekiah.¹⁷ And he wrote letters to cast **contempt** on the LORD, the God of Israel, and to speak against him, saying, "Like the gods of the nations of the lands who*

have not delivered their people from my hands, so the God of Hezekiah will not deliver his people from my hand.”¹⁸ And they shouted it with a loud voice in the language of Judah to the people of Jerusalem who were on the wall, to frighten and terrify them, in order that they might take the city.¹⁹ And they spoke of the God of Jerusalem as they spoke of the gods of the peoples of the earth, which are the work of men’s hands. (II Chron. 32:9-19)

B. Deliverance!

King Hezekiah knew just how to respond to such a threat. He called a **prayer meeting** with Isaiah the prophet!

²⁰ Then Hezekiah the king and Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, prayed because of this and cried to heaven.²¹ And the LORD sent an angel, who cut off all the mighty warriors and commanders and officers in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land...²² So the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib king of Assyria and from the hand of all his enemies, and he provided for them on every side. (II Chron. 32:20-22)

The account of this deliverance in II Kings adds additional elements to the story.

1) Hezekiah’s prayer.

Sennacherib, the commander of Assyrian army, had sent a letter to Hezekiah threatening him with destruction if he refuses to surrender to the invading army.

*¹⁴ Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD and spread it before the LORD.¹⁵ And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD and said: “O LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth.¹⁶ Incline your ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to **mock** the living God.¹⁷ Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands¹⁸ and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods, but the work of men’s hands, wood and stone. Therefore, they were destroyed.¹⁹ So now, O LORD our God, save us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that **you, O LORD, are God alone.**” (II Kings 19:14-19)*

2) God’s miraculous deliverance.

³⁵ And that night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, there were all dead bodies.³⁶ Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went home and lived at Nineveh.³⁷ And as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, Adrammelech and Sharezer, his sons, struck him down with the sword and escaped into the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place. (II Kings 19:35-37)

TABLE TALK

1. What is the difference between a revival and a reformation? Why is this distinction important?
2. When you think of the American church today, which is needed more: revival or reformation?
3. Look again at the five elements of Hezekiah's reformation:
 - a. Empower godly leaders.
 - b. Clean out the filth.
 - c. Offer atonement for sin.
 - d. Rediscover joyful thanksgiving and praise.
 - e. Reformation.

As you think about how these elements were implemented in Hezekiah's day, think about how they are needed in our day. Which elements are most needed to help the people of God do the work of God in our generation?

4. Does it seem unfair to you that after so many years of godly faithfulness, God permitted the Assyrian army to invade Judah anyway? What lesson should we learn from this?
5. Where do you feel "under attack" this morning? What can you learn from Hezekiah's response to help you respond to your situation in a more godly manner?

IV. Third Period: A Chink in the Armor (II Chron. 32:24-33).¹**A. A Fatal Flaw.**

As with all the other "good" kings of Judah, Hezekiah also has a flaw in his character, a chink in his armor.² Whether or not this **moral weakness** was present earlier in his life, it became exposed only in his latter years. The enemy (Satan) took full advantage of this chink once it became manifest.

¹ Much of the material in this section comes from the account in II Kings 18-20 rather than II Chronicles.

² The phrase "a chink in one's armor" refers to a narrow opening, a crack, a gap in a suit of armor that made a medieval soldier vulnerable in that spot, in spite of being well-protected everywhere else. Opponents would seek to exploit this by aiming their attacks at this area.

B. A Prophetic Announcement.

*In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. And Isaiah, the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Set your house in order, for you shall **die**; you shall **not recover**.' "* (II Kings 20:1)

Hezekiah was 39 years of age and in the prime of life. He had walked in obedience and faithfulness for many years and had led the nation in revival and reformation. Yet there was much more work to be done. Think how you might have responded in a similar situation. What might your response have been?

C. A Bitter Response.

² *Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and **prayed** to the LORD, saying, ³ "Now, O LORD, please remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight." And Hezekiah **wept bitterly**. (II Kings 20:2-3)*

There is nothing alarming in the fact that Hezekiah prayed, asking God for healing. This indeed may be considered as a sign of great faith! But it was his bitter spirit that revealed the true condition of his heart. And this was the chink in his armor that permitted the enemy to come in like a flood. We get an even greater insight into Hezekiah's emotional state in the hymn of thanksgiving he wrote after his recovery. The hymn is recorded in the Book of Isaiah.

⁹ *A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, after he had been sick and had recovered from his sickness:*

- ¹⁰ *I said, In the middle of my days I must depart;
I am consigned to the gates of Sheol for the rest of my years.*
- ¹¹ *I said, I shall not see the LORD, the LORD in the land of the living;
I shall look on man no more among the inhabitants of the world.*
- ¹² *My dwelling is plucked up and removed from me like a shepherd's tent;
like a weaver I have rolled up my life; he cuts me off from the loom:
from day to night you bring me to an end;*
- ¹³ *I calmed myself until morning; like a lion he breaks all my bones;
from day to night you bring me to an end.*
- ¹⁴ *Like a swallow or a crane I chirp; I moan like a dove.
My eyes are weary with looking upward.
O Lord, I am oppressed; be my pledge of safety!*
- ¹⁵ *What shall I say? For he has spoken to me, and he himself has done it.
I walk slowly all my years because of the **bitterness** of my soul.*
- ¹⁶ *O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these is the life of my spirit.
Oh restore me to health and make me live!*
- ¹⁷ *Behold, it was for my welfare that I had great **bitterness**;
but in love you have delivered my life from the pit of destruction,*

for you have cast all my sins behind your back.
¹⁸ For Sheol does not thank you; death does not praise you;
 those who go down to the pit do not hope for your faithfulness.
¹⁹ The living, the living, he thanks you, as I do this day;
 the father makes known to the children your faithfulness.
²⁰ The LORD will save me, and we will play my music on stringed
 instruments all the days of our lives, at the house of the LORD.
 (Isaiah 38:9-20).

D. A Compassionate Response.

Surprisingly, God responded to Hezekiah's prayer, overlooking (?) the bitterness that lay behind it. Although he had just announced that Hezekiah was about to die (II Kings 20:1), he **changed his mind** (?) and healed him, giving him 15 extra years.

⁴ And before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him: ⁵ "Turn back, and say to Hezekiah the leader of my people, Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD, ⁶ and I will add fifteen years to your life. I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city for my own sake and for my servant David's sake." ⁷ And Isaiah said, "Bring a cake of figs. And let them take and lay it on the boil, that he may recover." ⁸ And Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "What shall be the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of the LORD on the third day?" ⁹ And Isaiah said, "This shall be the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that he has promised: shall the shadow go forward ten steps, or go back ten steps?" ¹⁰ And Hezekiah answered, "It is an easy thing for the shadow to lengthen ten steps. Rather let the shadow go back ten steps." ¹¹ And Isaiah the prophet called to the LORD, and he brought the shadow back ten steps, by which it had gone down on the steps of Ahaz. (II Kings 20:2-11)

E. A Sobering Consequence.

Sometimes God answers prayers that are selfishly motivated or even contrary to his original intention! However, these answers sometimes come with sobering consequences, as is seen in the incident in the wilderness when the Israelites had a craving for meat (Numbers 11). Tired of the manna that God had provided, they begged Moses to give them meat. In anger, God responded to their plea and gave them what they wanted.

¹⁸ ...Therefore the LORD will give you meat, and you shall eat. ¹⁹ You shall not eat just one day, or two days, or five days, or ten days, or twenty days, ²⁰ but a whole month, until it **comes out at your nostrils** and becomes loathsome to you, because you have rejected the LORD who is among you and have wept before him, saying, "Why did we come out of Egypt?" "....

³¹ Then a wind from the LORD sprang up, and it brought quail from the sea and let them fall beside the camp, about a day's journey on this side and a day's journey on the other side, around the camp, and about two cubits (about 3 feet) above the ground. ³² And the people rose all that day and all night and all the next day, and

gathered the quail. Those who gathered least gathered ten homers (about 60 bushels). And they spread them out for themselves all around the camp.³³ While the meat was yet between their teeth, before it was consumed, the anger of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD struck down the people with a very great plague. (Numbers 11:18-20, 31-33)

The psalmist, in commenting on this incident in the desert, says simply that God *gave them what they asked, but sent a **wasting disease** among them (Psalm 106:15).*

We see something similar in the case of Hezekiah. Though God answered his prayer and healed him of his disease, the consequences of getting what he wanted were sobering. Two tragic events occurred during the 15 years of extended life that were granted to Hezekiah.

1. The visit from the Babylonian envoys.

*¹² At that time Merodach-baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent envoys with letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that Hezekiah had been sick.¹³ And Hezekiah welcomed them, and he showed them **all his treasure house**, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his armory, all that was found in his storehouses. There was nothing in his house or in all his realm that Hezekiah did not show them.¹⁴ Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah, and said to him, "What did these men say? And from where did they come to you?" And Hezekiah said, "They have come from a far country, from Babylon."¹⁵ He said, "What have they seen in your house?" And Hezekiah answered, "They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing in my storehouses that I did not show them."¹⁶ Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD:¹⁷ Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the LORD.¹⁸ And some of your own sons, who shall be born to you, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."¹⁹ Then said Hezekiah to Isaiah, "The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good." For he thought, "Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days?" (II Kings 20:12-19)*

Hezekiah's warm welcome of the delegation from Babylon was probably an attempt to impress the rising superpower with Judah's wealth and power. However, his actions would bring about the exact opposite of what he intended. Lured by the smell of wealth, the Babylonians would be back again... but the next time they would be looking for plunder. Isaiah was prophetic and 115 years later, Judah would be destroyed by Babylon and taken into exile.

2. Birth of a disaster.

During the 15 years of additional life granted to Hezekiah, a son was born to a king who would eventually become the next ruler of Judah: Manasseh.

*Manasseh was **twelve years old** when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem.² And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD drove out before*

the people of Israel. ³ For he rebuilt the high places that his father Hezekiah had broken down, and he erected altars to the Baals, and made Asherahs, and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. ⁴ And he built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem shall my name be forever." ⁵ And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. ⁶ And he burned his sons as an offering in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, and used fortune-telling and omens and sorcery, and dealt with mediums and with necromancers. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger... ⁹ Manasseh led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray, to do more evil than the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the people of Israel. (II Chron. 33:1-6, 9)

Reigning longer than any other king in Judah's history, Manasseh **reversed** the spiritual progress that his father Hezekiah had made and led the nation into idolatry... and the judgment of God. Manasseh was to Judah what Ahab was to Israel: the worst of the worst!

F. Application: How do I apply this story to my life?

1. Be careful **what you ask for**.

Hezekiah made a fatal assumption: **I know what is best for me!** Amazingly, he talked God into supporting his plan (healing, additional years of life). In this simple story, we will likely discover that our deepest theological beliefs are being challenged:

- About the sovereignty of God.
- About prayer.
- About predestination.
- About human responsibility.

Take a moment and think about some of the most burning prayer requests you are currently asking God to answer. Is it possible that if God actually did for you what you are asking him to do... you would ultimately regret it?

2. Be alert against **bitterness**.

When God told Hezekiah he would die in the prime of life (age 39), he turned his face to the wall and *wept bitterly* (II Kings 20:3).

While we may be able to understand why Hezekiah would be bitter (I'm young 39), I've lived a godly life, and the nation needs me, we must recognize that bitterness, like **poison**, has the capacity to destroy us... and those around us. Two passages emphasize this point.

a) Deuteronomy 29:18-20.

*¹⁸ Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the LORD our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. Beware lest there be among you **a root** bearing poisonous and*

bitter fruit ¹⁹ one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.' This will lead to the sweeping away of moist and dry alike. ²⁰ The LORD will not be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the LORD and his jealousy will smoke against that man, and the curses written in this book will settle upon him, and the LORD will blot out his name from under heaven.

This passage reminds us that bitterness is:

- The moral equivalent of **idolatry**.
- Has both a root and a fruit.
- Results in thinking I can sin with **impunity** (*I shall be safe though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart*).
- Brings in judgment, wrath and destruction.

b) Hebrews 12:15.

See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.

Building on the Deuteronomy text, Hebrews adds to our understanding by telling us that bitterness is:

- The result of failing to obtain **God's grace**.
- **Contagious**.

c) Think about it.

What makes men bitter? Name some things that happen in life that have the capacity to cause bitterness to take root in someone's soul.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

After reflecting on the life of Hezekiah, the Scriptures we've looked at (Deut. 29:18-20 and Heb. 12:15), and your own life experiences, name some of the consequences that come to one who harbors a bitter spirit.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
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d) Action Steps.

1) **Confess** bitterness as a sin.

We are so often tempted to excuse bitterness by claiming we have a right to feel this way. We are often tempted to redefine bitterness by pretending we're not bitter, only "hurt." But if hatred, resentment, jealousy, etc. continue to define our attitudes, the most likely explanation is that somewhere in our soul is a root of bitterness. We will never find freedom until we call it by its right name. The biblical term for this is confession.

⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:9-10)

2) Ask God to help you tear down **strongholds**.

When bitterness finds root in our soul, it usually builds up a stronghold: a mindset, a disposition, a focus, that is displeasing to God. Strongholds are built around lies. Our weapon against lies is the Truth. With God's help we can search out and destroy every false idea and conclusion that Satan has caused us to accept (I'm not good, I'll never change, I deserved what happened to me, God doesn't love me, my life is cursed, etc.).

³ For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵ We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, ⁶ being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

3) **Forgive** the offender.

Now that we understand the source of bitterness and its destructive and demonic consequences, we can find motivation from God's Holy Spirit to forgive the ones who have offended us. We really can forgive others because we have been on the receiving end ourselves: God has forgiven us!

³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Eph. 4:31-32)

TABLE TALK

1. Has God ever given you something you really wanted... and then you regretted that he did? What lesson did you learn?
2. Discuss together some of the answers you wrote down to the two questions above:
 - What makes men bitter?
 - What are some consequences of harboring a bitter spirit?
3. Make it personal. Is there an area in your own life where bitterness has the potential of taking root?
4. Pray with one another... for one another.