

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

2 KINGS 18-21

The Assyrian War Machine seemed invincible...

At the time Assyria had the largest standing army the Middle East had ever seen – *troops numbering in the hundreds of thousands*. Skilled charioteers, iron swords, lances, metal armor, giant siege towers, and heavy battering rams.

The Assyrians were also experts in the use of propaganda and intimidation.

They piled human skulls at the gates of conquered towns to inspire fear in the hearts of passers-by. Messengers were sent to besieged cities to scare them into surrender. They interpreted each victory as a conquest for the gods of Assyria.

In the year 722 BC the Assyrian Empire sprawled across the continent.

Israel had been conquered - its king taken prisoner - the capitol of Samaria was sacked. The northern kingdom - 10 of the 12 Hebrew tribes - had been scattered.

The Assyrians are on a roll – and they're casting a shadow over the southern kingdom of Judah. The drama intensifies when Isaiah meets King Ahaz in a field north of Jerusalem. He warns him that Judah will be judged by unless he repents. *Read the account in Isaiah 7*. Judgment would've occurred if Ahaz had not died.

Judah is saved by the repentance and prayer of his successor, Hezekiah. Tonight, we'll read about God's deliverance of Judah from the Assyrians.

Chapter 18, “Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea the son of Elah, king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign.

He was 25 years old when he became king, and he reigned 29 years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abi the daughter of Zechariah.

And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done. He removed the high places...” Hezekiah did what his predecessors lacked the courage to do. He went throughout Judah and removed the private altars – the altars of convenience – the high places. He insisted that God be worshipped as God desired to be worshipped – in the Temple.

“And (he) broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan.”

The word “*Nehustan*” means “*a thing of bronze*”.

Amazingly, the Hebrews made an idol out of an instrument of God’s grace.

Remember the occasion, when Israel rebelled against God in the wilderness He sent serpents into the camp. Moses made a bronze serpent as a means of healing. Everyone bitten was told to look on the bronze snake and be healed.

Bronze was a symbol of judgment. The serpent was a symbol of sin. So the bronze serpent was a symbol of sin’s judgment and God’s atonement.

In fact, in John 3:14, Jesus said the bronze serpent spoke figuratively of His crucifixion. “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” On the cross sin was judged - its penalty paid - salvation was won.

Apparently, the people of Judah replaced God with a symbol of God.

They turned the bronze serpent into an idol. This is why God renamed it, “**Nehustan**” – “*a bronze thing.*” It had no power of its own. It was “*just a thing*”.

It seems to me that whenever people lose the personal awareness of God’s presence, they substitute a reminder of what they once possessed. They get attached to a relic - or become preoccupied with some ritual or observance.

They try to fill the void in their life with *resemblance*, rather than *substance*.

But the *things of God* are a sorry substitute for *God Himself*. They’re always a “*Nehushtan*” – *just a thing!* The way back to God is a simpler route, but probably harder... confession and true repentance. Admit your sin, and trust in Jesus.

Verse 5 pays Hezekiah quite a compliment, “**He trusted in the LORD God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him.**” Hezekiah was the man of the hour. He was just what Judah needed for the crisis at hand. Rather than bow to Assyria, he trusted in God.

“For he held fast to the LORD; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD had commanded Moses.” 2 Chronicles tells us of Hezekiah’s additional reforms... he cleansed and reopened the Temple after Ahaz had closed it down, he purified the priests, he reinstated the Passover...”

Asa, Jehoshaphat, and Uzziah were also good kings, but none went as far as Hezekiah in his desire to please God. Hezekiah led the people back to the Law.

And as a result, “The LORD was with him; he prospered wherever he went.”

“And he rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him. He subdued the Philistines, as far as Gaza and its territory, from watchtower to fortified city.”

“Now it came to pass in the fourth year of King Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of Hoshea the son of Elah, king of Israel, that Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against Samaria and besieged it.” The year was 725 BC.

“And at the end of three years they took it.” Samaria fell in 722 BC.

“In the sixth year of Hezekiah, that is, the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel, Samaria was taken. Then the king of Assyria carried Israel away captive to Assyria, and put them in Halah and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes...” And here’s Hezekiah’s understanding of why her northern brothers fell – it was not because of their military weakness or Assyria’s strength.

But “because they did not obey the voice of the LORD their God, but transgressed His covenant and all that Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded; and they would neither hear nor do them.”

“And in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them.” These were the border towns – the northern suburbs of Jerusalem - Judah’s first line of defense.

Assyria breezes through these barricades and camps outside the city’s walls.

“Then Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying, "I have done wrong; turn away from me; whatever you impose on me I will pay."

Hezekiah panicked. He was a good king, but not a perfect king... One day he looks out his window and sees hordes of ferocious warriors just outside the wall – like ants on buttered bread. His courage disappears. He capitulates...

“And the king of Assyria assessed Hezekiah king of Judah 300 talents of silver and thirty talents of gold.” A talent was a measurement of about 100 pounds. The king of Assyrian is demanding 30,000 pounds of silver and 3000 pounds of gold.

Verse 15 “So Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the king's house. At that time Hezekiah stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of the LORD, and from the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria.”

This was the strategy the kings of Israel had adopted. They tried to buy off the Assyrians, but they kept coming back for more until they finally took it all.

And I hope you understand this is how Satan works... Don't think, "If I give into temptation a little - try it one time - then it'll go away. I'll do it this one time - then I'll stop." Don't be a fool! It never works that way. Satan isn't satisfied with stealing a little of your virtue - or putting a dent in your integrity. He wants to destroy you.

This was also the case with Sennacherib, king of Assyria. "Then the king of Assyria sent the Tartan, the Rabsaris, and the Rabshakeh from Lachish, with a great army against Jerusalem, to King Hezekiah." Lachish was the Assyrian command post southwest of Jerusalem – which indicates they had the city surrounded. From Lachish Sennacherib sends three officials to Hezekiah.

"Tartan" was the chairman of the joint-chiefs-of-staff - the military leader.

"Rabsaris" was the chief eunuch – probably the White House chief-of-staff.

"Rabshakeh" was the chief cupbearer. The position Nehemiah will occupy.

An Assyrian trademark was its propaganda machine. They sent messengers to play to a people's fears, and intimidate. Cities often surrendered without a fight.

"And they went up and came to Jerusalem. When they had come up, they went and stood by the aqueduct from the upper pool, which was on the highway to the Fuller's Field."

Their location is strategic. Read Isaiah 7. The “Fuller’s Field” was where prophet Isaiah confronted King Ahaz – and warned of God’s judgment.

Evidently, the Assyrians knew of Isaiah’s prophecy.

“And when they had called to the king, Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder, came out to them. Then the Rabshakeh said to them, "Say now to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: "What confidence is this in which you trust?

You speak of having plans and power for war; but they are mere words. And in whom do you trust, that you rebel against me? Now look! You are trusting in the staff of this broken reed, Egypt, on which if a man leans, it will go into his hand and pierce it. So is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him.”

Surely, Hezekiah isn’t depending on a *flimsy Pharaoh* to come to his aide?

“But if you say to me, 'We trust in the LORD our God,' is it not He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has taken away, and said to Judah and Jerusalem, 'You shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem'?" '

"Now therefore, I urge you, give a pledge to my master the king of Assyria, and I will give you 2000 horses - if you are able on your part to put riders on them!

How then will you repel one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put your trust in Egypt for chariots and horsemen? Have I now come up without the LORD against

this place to destroy it? The LORD said to me, 'Go up against this land, and destroy it.' " Assyria is claiming to be Jehovah's tool of judgment.

"Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, Shebna, and Joah said to the Rabshakeh, "Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand it. And do not speak to us in Hebrew in the hearing of the people who are on the wall.""

The Hebrews were bilingual and could speak the Assyrian language. They wanted private negotiations so their troops wouldn't hear the propaganda.

"But the Rabshakeh said to them, "Has my master sent me to your master and to you to speak these words, and not to the men who sit on the wall, who will eat and drink their own waste with you?" He wanted to intimidate the rank-in-file.

Perhaps they would turn on their own leaders and force their surrender.

This was equivalent to the modern tactic of dropping leaflets from an airplane over the camp of your enemy - written in the enemy's language – encouraging them to rebel against their own officers and surrender. *Why be slaughtered?*

"Then the Rabshakeh stood and called out with a loud voice in Hebrew, and spoke, saying, "Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria!

Thus says the king: 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he shall not be able to deliver you from his hand; nor let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD, saying, "The LORD will surely deliver us; this city shall not be given into the hand

of the king of Assyria." Do not listen to Hezekiah; for thus says the king of Assyria:

'Make peace with me by a present and come out to me; and every one of you eat from his own vine and every one from his own fig tree, and every one of you drink the waters of his own cistern; until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive groves and honey, that you may live and not die.'" Here's a promise right out of *The Satanic book of Lies*. He tells them Sennacherib will lead them into a land of milk and honey. The bloodthirsty Assyrians will slaughter many of them.

"But do not listen to Hezekiah, lest he persuade you, saying, "The LORD will deliver us. Has any of the gods of the nations at all delivered its land from the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim and Hena and Ivah? Indeed, have they delivered Samaria from my hand? Who among all the gods of the lands have delivered their countries from my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem from my hand?" "

When Assyria went to battle they believed it was the gods of Assyria against the gods of their foes. It was *my god* versus *your god*. *May the best god win!*

And the Assyrian diplomats innumerate all the gods that have fallen before them... what makes Judah think, Jehovah God will be any different.

Hey, this is the argument Satan uses on many folks. "You've tried religion... it didn't work. Why do you think Jesus will be

any different?” Hey, it could be you’ve yet to try the **right religion**. Perhaps you’ve yet to knock on the right door...

Yes, the Assyrians had defeated *all the gods of all the nations* they had conquered, but perhaps they’ve yet to run across the one, true God!

“But the people held their peace and answered him not a word; for the king's commandment was, "Do not answer him." Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, Shebna the scribe... Joah... the recorder, came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn, and told him the words of the Rabshakeh.”

In chapter 19 Hezekiah responds to the Assyrian threat the way we should respond to the crisis we face. *He prays!* He takes his problem to the Lord.

“And so it was, when King Hezekiah heard it, that he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD.” I’m not sure you need to tear your clothes, and buy some burlap – but the idea is to humble yourself – admit your neediness. Seek God’s active assistance.

“Then he sent Eliakim, who was over the household, Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz.” Hezekiah sends a prayer request to the prophet Isaiah...

And they said to him, "Thus says Hezekiah: 'This day is a day of trouble, and rebuke, and blasphemy; for the children have come to birth, but there is no strength to bring them forth. It may be that the LORD your God will hear all the

words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to reproach the living God, and will rebuke the words which the LORD your God has heard. Therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left.' "

“So the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah.

And Isaiah said to them, "Thus you shall say to your master, 'Thus says the LORD: "Do not be afraid of the words which you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me.

Surely I will send a spirit upon him, and he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land." What an encouragement to Hezekiah. This will take nothing less of a miracle. If Hezekiah holds his ground, God will send Sennacherib back to Assyria.

“Then the Rabshakeh returned and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah, for he heard that he had departed from Lachish.

And the king heard concerning Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, "Look, he has come out to make war with you." So he again sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying..."

While the delegation has been in Jerusalem Assyria has engaged itself in other conflicts. Assyria is fighting on different fronts, and Sennacherib doesn't want to waste firepower on a little nation like Judah, so again he tries to intimidate Hezekiah into surrender. This time he uses a letter, in verses 10-13...

"Thus you shall speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying: 'Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you, saying, "Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria." 'Look! You have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands by utterly destroying them; and shall you be delivered?

Have the gods of the nations delivered those whom my fathers have destroyed, Gozan and Haran and Rezeph, and the people of Eden who were in Telassar?

Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah?' " Similar rhetoric to what he heard previously.

It reminds me of the pastor who received a threatening letter. Only one word had been written, "Fool." That Sunday he brought the letter to the pulpit. He told the crowd he'd received an unusual letter. "Never before have I opened a letter where the writer signed his name, but forgot to write anything else..."

Well, Hezekiah also brings his letter to Church...

Verse 14 "And 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." He immediately takes this letter into the temple, and unrolls the scroll out before the Lord. I hope this is how you handle your problems... *Take it to the Lord!* Spread it out before Him. "Lord, here it is! This is what I'm up against!"

God knows the details, but it helps us to just spread it all out before Him.

Verse 15 “Then Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said: “O LORD God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.” Hezekiah spreads out the situation, but then he focuses on God. Yes, this is a *big problem*, but Hezekiah has a *big God*. “You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.” God is the Creator. He’s sovereign over all the kingdoms. No king is greater... no problem bigger... than God.

Often *our problem* can cloud *our perspective*. This is why once you spread out the problem – immediately shift your focus off the problem and onto the Lord.

The king continues, “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 reproach the living God. Truly, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands, 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 destroyed them.” So what they’ve knocked off a few wooden statues. Let’s see how they do against the real God... “Now therefore, O LORD our God, I pray, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the LORD God, You alone.”

I love this prayer of Hezekiah... I call it, “*A Back Against the Wall Prayer*”.

There are times in everyone’s life when the odds are against them.

In those moments, here's a five-fold prayer to pray - **Take it God... Spread it out before Him... Focus on God and His greatness... See the situation from His perspective... Make your request with His glory in mind...**

Verse 20, "Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Because you have prayed to Me against Sennacherib king of Assyria, I have heard.' Isaiah delivers God's answer to the king's prayer.

"This is the word which the LORD has spoken concerning him: 'The virgin, the daughter of Zion, has despised you, laughed you to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem Has shaken her head behind your back!" Assyria will become a laughingstock. She's foolishly dared to speak against the one, true God.

'Whom have you reproached and blasphemed? Against whom have you raised your voice, and lifted up your eyes on high? Against the Holy One of Israel.

"By your messengers you have reproached the Lord, and said: "By the multitude of my chariots I have come up to the height of the mountains, to the limits of Lebanon; I will cut down its tall cedars and its choice cypress trees; I will enter the extremity of its borders, to its fruitful forest. I have dug and drunk strange water, and with the soles of my feet I have dried up all the brooks of defense."

Notice Assyria's boast... it's "I...I...I..." She's taken credit for her success.

'Did you not hear long ago how I made it, from ancient times that I formed it? Now I have brought it to pass, that you should be for crushing fortified cities into heaps of ruins. Therefore their inhabitants had little power; they were dismayed and confounded; they were as the grass of the field and the green herb, as the grass on the housetops and grain blighted before it is grown.' For centuries the Hebrew prophets had predicted God would use Assyria as an instrument of His judgment. God was responsible for Assyria's rise to power – not Assyria.

I love what God says to Sennacherib in verse 27, **"But I know your dwelling place..."** **"Hey, I know where you live!"** – an ominous threat coming from God.

Before my dad retired he worked for the telephone company. That's why when mom starting getting obscene phone calls he was able to trace the call. He got the name and address of the person who was making the calls, and drove by the guy's house. He saw his car. He even got a look at the teenage culprit.

Then my dad called the boy. He told him his address - the make, model, and color of his car. He even gave him a description of what he'd been wearing that day. Then the boy was reminded that he didn't know what my dad looked like...

Dad assured the boy, if my mom got another obscene phone call he'd strike when it was least expected. He'd make sure he never made another phone call. That was the end of the calls. It's frightening to hear... *"I know where you live!"*

This is what God says to Sennacherib. 'But I know your dwelling place, your going out and your coming in, and your rage against Me. Because your rage against Me and your tumult Have come up to My ears, therefore I will put My hook in your nose and My bridle in your lips, and I will turn you back by the way which you came.' God will lead Assyria around like a dog on a leash.

Remember, at the time Assyria was *the world's lone superpower*, but God is in control, not King Sennacherib... or for that matter the President, the Premier, etc.

Verse 29, 'This shall be a sign to you: you shall eat this year such as grows of itself, and in the second year what springs from the same; also in the third year sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them.' In other words, God promises that this threat will pass. They'll still be eating the fruit of their land.

"And the remnant who have escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward. For out of Jerusalem shall go a remnant, and those who escape from Mount Zion. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.'" It won't be Hezekiah's might that will deliver Judah. God will do the work!

"Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: 'He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor build a siege mound against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return; and he shall not come into this city,' says the LORD.

The walls of Jerusalem won't be breached. There will be no attack. 'For I will defend this city, to save it For My own sake and for My servant David's sake.'

The showdown occurred at night, outside Jerusalem's gates, in the camp of the Assyrians. Verse 35 gives us details, "And it came to pass on a certain night that the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians 185,000, and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses - all dead."

One combat angel sent by God took out an army of 185,000 troops in a single night. And an 185,000 people is roughly the population of Columbus, GA.

Not only does the Bible record the slaughter, it also appears in secular history. The Greek historian, Herodotus, makes mention of Sennacherib's defeat.

He says a plague of mice invaded the Assyrian camp.

"So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned home, and remained at Nineveh." When Sennacherib awoke to the news of such a crushing defeat he tucked tail and ran home to Nineveh. He should've been worshipping the one true God, but instead he returned to pay homage to his pagan idols.

"Now it came to pass, as he was worshiping in the temple of Nisroch his god, that his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer struck him down with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. Then Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place." This fulfilled God's word to Sennacherib... In **19:28**, *He would*

return the same way he came... 19:7, he would fall by the sword in his own land.

Chapter 20, “In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death.” The king became seriously sick. It looked as if he was going to die.

“And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, “Thus says the LORD: ‘Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live.’” This is not an encouraging prognosis, and it’s coming from God - the Great Physician...

Hezekiah has just experienced the power of prayer, so he prays again, “Then he turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the LORD, saying, “Remember now, O LORD, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what was good in Your sight.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

And it happened, before Isaiah had gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying, “Return and tell 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; surely I will heal you.” And it will be immediate...

For “On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD. And I will add to your days 15 years. I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake, and for the sake of My servant David.” Then Isaiah said, “Take a lump of figs.” So they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered.” Here’s an amazing story with heavy theological implications.

Apparently, God changed His mind. Isaiah spoke, "**Thus says the LORD: 'Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live.'**" But when Hezekiah prays, God changes his mind. He heals him - and gives Hezekiah 15 more years.

Now, here's the question... *is it really possible for us to change God's mind?*

I believe the answer is a clear-cut... **yes and no**. God has some plans that are unalterable. They are set in stone. But He leaves other plans subject to our input.

As a father, and the head of my household, this is how I operate...

At times I make decisions that aren't going to change no matter how much pleading my kids do. My decision is a done deal! Whereas there are other decisions where I'm open and flexible - in fact, I'm looking for input.

And you never know which decision is which until you ask.

This is why God encourages us to pray. You never know. Sometimes God's will is set in stone. But more often than not, God is looking for and wants our input. He wants us to feel a part of His family, and we will if He gives us a say in decisions.

This is why we're told in Ephesians 6:18 to be "**praying always**".

Now, having said that, *is it wise to change God's mind once He's spoken?*

Hezekiah was given 15 more years, but as we'll see during those 15 years two events take place that have a negative impact on the future of Judah...

Verse 8 "And Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "What is the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of the LORD the third day?"

Then Isaiah said, "This is the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing which He has spoken: shall the shadow go forward 10 degrees or go backward 10 degrees?" And Hezekiah answered, "It is an easy thing for the shadow to go down 10 degrees; no, but let the shadow go backward 10 degrees."

So Isaiah the prophet cried out to the LORD, and He brought the shadow 10 degrees backward, by which it had gone down on the sundial of Ahaz.

When Isaiah asks for a sign to validate God's promise to Hezekiah, the Lord blows him away. He turns the shadow on the sundial back 10 degrees - or 45 minutes. Some commentators try to explain the phenomena as a formation of clouds that refracted the sunlight. But that would hardly explain what's stated.

There is historical evidence that along with Sennacherib's defeat certain celestial, cataclysmic events took place. What caused Joshua's long day may have also occurred here. Perhaps a near fly-by with another planet - or a comet penetrating the earth's atmosphere - may've caused a tilt in the earth's axis.

Interestingly, prior to Hezekiah's day the world's calendars were marked by 360 day years – 12 months of 30 days. But around this time, ancient calendars start to make adjustments for the asymmetrical rotation caused by the earth's tilted axis.

It's possible that God's attack on the Assyrians – the loss of 45 minutes on the calendar - and some kind of a cataclysmic, astronomical event - all coincided.

In the latter half of chapter 20 the Babylonians send a get-well delegation to Hezekiah. Verse 12 “At that time Berodach-baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that Hezekiah had been sick. And Hezekiah was attentive to them, and showed them all the house of his treasures - the silver and gold, the spices and precious ointment, and all his armory - all that was found among his treasures. There was nothing in his house or in all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them.” This was foolish.

Hezekiah takes Babylonian spies on a tour of his royal treasures.

“Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah, and said to him, "What did these men say, and from where did they come to you?" So Hezekiah said, "They came from a far country, from Babylon." And he said, "What have they seen in your house?" So Hezekiah answered, "They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them."

Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD: 'Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house,

and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,' says the LORD.”

The Babylonians will remember what they've seen and want it for themselves...

“And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.’

This is what happened to Daniel – and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

“So Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "The word of the LORD which you have spoken is good!" For he said, "Will there not be peace and truth at least in my days?" This shows Hezekiah's short-sightedness. In essence he responds... *I'm not worried about the future as long as there's peace today. He only cares about his lifetime.*

Sounds like those who oppose America's war against terrorism...

“Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah - all his might, and how he made a pool and a tunnel and brought water into the city - are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? On our last trip to Jerusalem we saw Hezekiah's tunnel. It's quite a feat of engineering – 6' high, 2½' wide, and runs 1700' through solid stone. It brought water from the Gihon spring to the pool of Siloam.

Hezekiah built the tunnel in anticipation of a prolonged siege. It was a water supply within the walls. Today, you can roll up your pants and walk the tunnel.

“So Hezekiah rested with his fathers. Then Manasseh his son reigned in his place.” And the mere mention of the name should send chills up your spine...

Chapter 21 opens with a litany of King Manasseh’s sins...

“Manasseh was 12 years old when he became king, and he reigned 55 years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hephzibah. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel. For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; he raised up altars for Baal, and made a wooden image, as Ahab king of Israel had done; and he worshiped all the host of heaven and served them.” In other words, he was into astrology. He sought the stars for guidance.

“He also built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem I will put My name." And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD.” Manasseh even brought idolatry into the Temple. This was God’s dwelling place on earth - His footstool. The Temple in Jerusalem was the one place the Hebrews knew they could meet with God.

Manasseh turned the house of the living God into a museum of idols.

“Also he made his son pass through the fire (child sacrifice), practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft, and consulted spiritists and mediums.”

Manasseh was into the occult. He was a witch. He invoked Satanic powers to do his bidding. And Judah had to put up

with him for longer than any other king – 55 years. “He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger.”

He even set a carved image of Asherah that he had made, in the house of which the LORD had said to David and to Solomon his son, "In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever; and I will not make the feet of Israel wander anymore from the land which I gave their fathers - only if they are careful to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that My servant Moses commanded them." Manasseh worshipped a lewd, fertility goddess in the very place where God had promised to give life to His people.

And Judah allowed Manasseh to do these evils. They knew the Law of Moses, verse 9, “But they paid no attention, and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than the nations whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel.”

Tradition tells us that Manasseh even had the prophet Isaiah sawn in two.

“And the LORD spoke by His servants the prophets, saying, "Because Manasseh king of Judah has done these abominations (he has acted more wickedly than all the Amorites who were before him, and has also made Judah sin with his idols), therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Behold, I am bringing such calamity upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle.’” Manasseh’s sin caused a judgment so fierce it’ll *shiver ye timbers*.

Verse 13 “And I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab; I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down.” Think of cleaning up after dinner.

“So I will forsake the remnant of My inheritance and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become victims of plunder to all their enemies, because they have done evil in My sight, and have provoked Me to anger since the day their fathers came out of Egypt, even to this day.' ”

Moreover Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another (he was violent as well as vile), besides his sin by which he made Judah sin, in doing evil in the sight of the LORD.”

Verse 17, “Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh - all that he did, and the sin that he committed - are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? So Manasseh rested with his fathers, and was buried in the garden of his own house, in the garden of Uzza. Then his son Amon reigned in his place.

2 Chronicles 33 tells us, late in life Manasseh repented, and God forgave him. *If God forgave Manasseh He'll forgive you.* And Manasseh tried to undo some of the damage he'd done. It was too little, too late. His son mimics his wickedness.

Verse 19 “Amon was 22 years old when he became king, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Meshullemeth the daughter of Haruz of Jotbah. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, as his father Manasseh had

done. So he walked in all the ways that his father had walked; and he served the idols that his father had served, and worshiped them. He forsook the LORD God of his fathers, and did not walk in the way of the LORD.

Then the servants of Amon conspired against him, and killed the king in his own house. But the people of the land executed all those who had conspired against King Amon.” The people of Judah refused to be plunged into anarchy...

“Then the people of the land made his son Josiah king in his place.

Now the rest of the acts of Amon which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And he was buried in his tomb in the garden of Uzza. Then Josiah his son reigned in his place.”

Which brings us back to the question, **should Hezekiah have changed God's mind?** In the 15 years his life was extended two tragedies occurred...

First, the evil Manasseh was born. According to Jeremiah 15:4, Judah will spend 70 years in exile in the land of Babylon because of this one man's sin.

Second, during his extra 15 years Hezekiah takes the Babylonian spies on a tour of Judah's royal treasury - which is one of the reasons they later invade.

I think Judah would've been better off if Hezekiah had submitted to God's initial verdict, and just kicked the bucket. God's ways are best. Sometimes we need to trust Him even though His will doesn't seem to be in our immediate interest.