

King Hezekiah:

The eleventh king of the Southern Kingdom found it simple to lead the people into worship of false gods. He even sacrificed his own son to a detestable false god. He caused the people to be subject to Assyria, and to receive Assyrian protection, he turned over the treasures of the Southern Kingdom. In a last act of desecration, he destroyed portions of the Temple and remodeled it to worship the gods of Assyria. This king was the most evil king the Southern Kingdom had until that time. King eleven, King Ahaz. He was my father.

Isaiah:

I knew King Ahaz. And he was evil even by evil standards. But his son, he was different. At least, that is what I hoped.

King Hezekiah:

Secrets fester and grow, the same with anything evil. Evil secrets, double the power. The seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth kings of Judah were almost good kings. More accurately, they had their ups and down. All of them kept the people from worshipping false gods in obvious public places. But, none of them tore down the secret high places where people worshipped out of sight, so none of them completely eliminated the worship of false gods. By not completely destroying the worship of false gods, these kings set the stage for my Father's evil reign.

Seven years before I became king, the Northern Kingdom was destroyed. With no Northern Kingdom, the Southern Kingdom came to be more commonly called the Kingdom of Judah, or just Judah. Because most of our land came from the original tribe of Judah. We were the only people left of the original Israelites, and so we became known as either Jews or Israelites.

From the time I was nine years-old, I watched my father lead the Southern Kingdom into vile worship practices. When I turned twenty-five, I became king, and I vowed to return Judah, to the sole worship of the One True God.

The Bible says this about me, "He trusted in the Lord God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, before or after him. He clung to the Lord and did not quit following him, but kept his commandments."¹

¹ 2 Kings 18:5-6

You may have already learned what I quickly learned. Following the Lord does not mean life will be trouble-free. When I took over the kingdom, I had to deal with the fact that my father had become subject to the king of Assyria. Any act of rebellion on my part would be dealt with harshly. I knew that because I saw the Northern Kingdom destroyed by Assyrians.

I tried to appease Assyria with treasure from my kingdom. But do you know what I found to be a better strategy? Rebel against them and trust in God to protect his people.

Instead of immediately assaulting our walls with his army, the Assyrian commander stood outside the city walls. He called for my representatives. You know, to come talk. He stood there and used calming language to threaten our sure doom. He spoke in Hebrew. All of the people could hear his threats. To their credit, my people kept quiet and did not show their panic, just as I had instructed them to do. When my representatives returned, and were out of sight of the enemy, they tore their clothes in distress. This is what we did when we were overwhelmed and out of options. I sent for the Lord's prophet, Isaiah.

Isaiah:

On my doorstep, dressed in sackcloth to show their distress and disgrace, King Hezekiah's representative appeared. They relayed the threats of the Assyrian commander and Hezekiah's request for my prayers. I heard them out. "Do not be afraid," I immediately told them, because God will surely make the Assyrian commander return to his own country where he will be killed. There was no reason to be afraid.

While King Hezekiah's men were still with me, the Assyrian commander learned that the Egyptian army might be headed his way. He quickly wrote a very threatening letter to Hezekiah hoping to get him to capitulate immediately. The letter was thoroughly disrespectful of God. Hezekiah prayed to God for his deliverance.

Meanwhile, I composed a message to Hezekiah. I told him that God had heard his prayers, and would surely defend His Holy City against the Assyrians. God said he would do that for his sake and for the sake of his ancestor, David.

That night, the Angel of the Lord went out among the camp and killed 180,000 Assyrian men. When the commander of the Assyrians awoke, dead bodies were everywhere. He wisely withdrew and went back to Assyria. Later, he was assassinated by his own sons.

Times of peaceful reign followed. King Hezekiah got older. Then he became ill to the point of death. The Lord told me to go to him and tell him to get his affairs in order because he was going to die.

Hezekiah:

Isaiah told me I was going to die. I was distressed to no end. I prayed fervently to God. I asked him to spare my life as a reward for my faithfulness to him. Isaiah hadn't even left the courtyard before God told him to return and tell me that not only would he spare my life, but

he would add fifteen years to it. As a verifying sign of Isaiah's prophecy, God made the shadow of my stairway go backwards ten steps. He did this by miraculously moving the sun backwards in the sky! Isaiah prepared a poultice, and I went to the Temple. I was healed.

While I was sick, however, the king of Babylon heard of my plight. At the time, Babylon was not a threat to my kingdom. The king had his representatives deliver letters and gifts to console me and show his respect. I welcomed them and very foolishly showed the Babylonian representatives all of my treasures, and I do mean all of my treasures. Old age pride, I guess.

When Isaiah heard about the Babylonian representatives, he came to warn me about them. I told him that I had already shown all of my treasures to them. He prophesied to me. He told me that the day would come when the Babylonians would come to carry off all my treasures and the people of my kingdom. In another fit of old-age pride, "That's fine. There will be peace and security in my life time."

Have you ever wanted someone to live longer than they did? God knows better than we do about how long people should live. My story should give you consolation of that. Solely because I asked him to, God granted my request to let me live fifteen years longer. I'm not sure I wish he had granted my wish.

Isaiah was correct. My prideful showing of my treasure probably had something to do with Judah being attacked by the Babylonians years later. Eventually they would destroy Judah and take my people into captivity.

Worse, during the fifteen years longer that I lived, I fathered a son named Manasseh. While I was the best king of Judah, he was the most evil. Because of him, Judah would eventually be destroyed by God.

Isaiah:

The prophet Micah and I prophesied during the kingships of Hezekiah and of his father, King Ahaz. Ahaz was as evil and unfaithful to God, as Hezekiah was good and faithful.

While Micah and I prophesied in Judah, Amos and Hosea prophesied in the Northern Kingdom. All four of us had the same message: Worship the Lord God and him only, and live your life in accordance with that worship.

I knew the people of Judah would only sporadically be faithful to God, and I knew God's patience would run out as with the Northern Kingdom. God's people did not want to behave like God's people...until it was too late. I preached from a sense of doom.

In your time, I am often called a "major" prophet. This is not because I am personally so special or my message was so different, but because my writing is so long. In your modern Bibles, my book has sixty-six chapters, the sixth longest book in the entire Bible. Some people perceive it is the longest because it is so hard and boring for them to read.

I had three major themes in my book. The first theme was that God is holy and just, and by his very nature is obligated to punish those who are rebellious. However, after punishing them, he wants to have compassion on them and redeem them to be his. This theme was obviously applicable to Judah because they would never quit worshiping false gods and idols. This theme was also applicable to other countries who worshiped false gods in ignorance of the True God. He wanted to redeem them as well.

My second major theme was that God is sovereign over all. He is a divine ruler characterized by justice, righteousness, and holiness. He calls his people to be the same way, especially by doing the right thing and seeking justice. God wants his people to protect the poor and helpless.

My third major theme concerned the Suffering Servant. I described the Suffering Servant as bringing justice and salvation for the Jews...and for all other peoples. I never identify the Suffering Servant by name, so some think I was referring to a Messiah, some think the nation of Israel, some the prophets. The New Testament identifies this Suffering Servant to be Jesus Christ.²

As you read the New Testament, you will find out that I am quoted. Often. I longed to see the Messiah and know him. God seemed to give me only glimpses of him.

Through the centuries, different people have become partial to different parts of my book. I want to point out two verses that could possibly be favorites of mine, found in Isaiah chapter 9 versus 6-7: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of his kingdom and peace there will be no end. He will reign as David over his kingdom, with judgement and justice and righteousness from that time to forever."

I knew three kings of Judah, and none of them were that type of king. I longed for that day so that my people would long to be God's people.

Micah and I would be the last prophets to Judah for several decades. Under King Hezekiah, the people returned to worship their God. Under his son, the people will descend to depths of depravity that I could not have imagined.

² Matthew 12:18-21, Luke 4:20-21