

(The Word for Today) Isaiah 37:14 - Part 2

by Chuck Smith

The sermon explores the sovereignty of God, the effect of prayer, and the importance of acknowledging God's sovereignty, using Hezekiah's story as an example.

Duration: 25:59

Scripture: Exodus 34:6, Isaiah 37:14, Isaiah 37:35, 1 Corinthians 13:12, Revelation 22:4

Topics: "Expositional"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the story of the descendants of Jacob and their journey out of Egypt. He highlights the encounter between Balaam and King Balak, where Balaam is initially forbidden by God to curse the invading people. However, when offered greater rewards, Balaam is permitted to go but is warned not to say more than what God tells him. The speaker raises the question of whether we sometimes settle for second or third best when we rebel against God's first plan for our lives. The sermon also touches on the promise given to Hezekiah of 15 more years of life and the sign of the shadow moving backward on the sundial. The speaker concludes by emphasizing the significance of Jesus' birth and the fulfillment of prophecies in his coming.

Transcript

Welcome to the Word for Today. The Word for Today is a continuous study of the Bible, taught by Pastor Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa, California. Pastor Chuck is currently teaching from the Old Testament, and if you're following along in your Bible, we'll be continuing today in Isaiah chapter 37, beginning with verse 14, as we continue with an in-depth message entitled, The Destruction of Assyria.

One thing is needful, O my Father, One thing is needful, O my God, That I sit at your feet, And pour out my love. This thing is needful, O my God. And now with today's study, here's Pastor Chuck.

And thus he prayed, and he was weeping, grievously weeping before God. And then came of the word of the Lord to Isaiah, saying, and actually we read in 2nd Kings chapter 20, that before he even got out of the court, he had come and given the king the message, and he was heading back out through the king's court. And when he was halfway through the court, here Hezekiah got the message, turned his face to the wall, started crying and praying unto God.

And before Hezekiah got to the middle of the court, the word of the Lord came to Isaiah, saying, Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David, thy Father, I have heard your prayer, I have seen

your tears, and I'll give you 15 more years. Interesting. Because it brings up this age-old problem concerning the sovereignty of God and the effect of prayer upon God.

You see, you can carry that sovereignty of God so far as to make man's actions totally unnecessary. God is going to do what He is going to do, and no man can stay the hand of God. Who is man to stay the hand of God? The purposes of God shall stand, and that which is purposed He shall accomplish.

And you can make prayer just really of no value or no effect, because God is going to do what He is going to do anyhow, so why pray? But this does show to us that prayer does change things. Hezekiah had received the message, Get your house in order. Get things straight, because you're going to die and not live.

And the fellow immediately began to pray and cry before the Lord. And instantly, before Isaiah even got out of the court, the Lord came to Isaiah and said, Go back and tell him, God's heard his prayers. He saw his tears.

He's going to give him 15 more years. Add 15 years to your life. And I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of the Assyrians, and I will defend this city.

You see, this is before the Assyrians had even come around. But they were taking other cities, and they had taken the northern kingdom, and so there was that threat. Now, it brings up another interesting problem.

The time is appointed for us to die. God has appointed time. It's appointed when a man wants to die.

And Hezekiah begged off his appointment. Postpone it, Lord. I don't want to meet you right now.

And his prayer that God would extend his life. And God heard and answered his prayer and extended his life. But was that for the best for the nation? Brings up an interesting question.

Because it was after this time that his wife bore a son by the name of Manasseh, who took over the kingdom at the death of Hezekiah. And Manasseh was the most wicked, ungodly king ever to reign in Judah. He led the nation spiritually down the tubes.

Everything that his father had done for God in a positive way, he undid. And so you think that for the nation, they would have been better off had Hezekiah died at that point. Which brings up another interesting kind of a thing.

And that is God's direct will for our lives and God's permissive will for our lives. And it would seem that God does have a direct first desire. But there is latitude and God will give you second or third best if you won't come to his first best for you.

His first best being his direct will for your life. Now we do know that God is not willing that any should perish. But that all should come to repentance.

Now if you don't come to God's first direct will for your life, then you will have God's permissive will and he'll permit you to destroy yourself. He'll permit you to go to hell. With Jacob, God said, now don't go down to Egypt.

Sojourn in the land here. But Jacob now hears that his son Joseph is alive. That they've got some years of famine left.

And Joseph is saying, Dad, come on down with the family. I'll take care of you well here in Egypt. God has blessed me.

And Jacob prayed and God said, OK, go to Egypt. But it would seem that that was a permissive will. The direct will was stay out of Egypt.

And getting out of Egypt was no easy task. It took them 400 years. And the descendants of Jacob went through some pretty hard times before they got out of Egypt.

And then they had to take by force this land. Balaam, when King Balak sent to him and said, Come and curse these people that are invading my land. And Balaam prayed and the Lord said, Thou art not to go to the king.

You're not to curse these people. They are my people. And so the king sent back other messengers, more notable, with greater rewards for divination.

And when he saw all of the loot that the king was offering him, he prayed again. Oh God, you've got to let me go. Please let me go.

Lord, I want to go. The Lord said, All right, go. But don't say more than what I tell you.

But there was the permissive will of God. The direct will of God was don't go. He was permitted to go.

And is it possible for us to insist that God give us second best or third best? That we sort of rebel against the first plan of God. And so he allows a lesser alternate plan for our lives. Interesting things to ponder in your meditations.

I'm not going to try and give you any answers because I don't have them. I only ask questions. Now, the promise to Hezekiah is that the Lord will give him 15 more years.

And I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, for I will defend this city. And God did that 12 years later. Quite a way.

And this shall be the sign unto you from the Lord. The Lord will do this thing that he has spoken. Interesting sign, very dramatic one indeed.

Behold, I will bring again the shadow of the degrees which has gone down on the sundial of Ahaz 10 degrees backwards. So the sun returned 10 degrees by which degrees it had gone down. Now, the physicists and the astronomers and all have great difficulty with this particular passage.

For we know that the sun actually doesn't revolve around the earth, but the earth revolves around the sun. And our day and night are caused by the revolution of the earth upon its axis. And so for the shadow to go back on the sundial would mean that the earth would have to stop its rotation and reverse itself and then start it up again.

And from a standpoint of physics, that would be a pretty tough thing because the earth is spinning at about a thousand miles an hour here on the surface. As we're spinning, you're going about a thousand miles an

hour. And to put on the brakes, you know what happens in your car when you put on the brakes suddenly. You know, you're thrown forward. And so the hypothesis would be that we'd all be thrown off the earth. If the thing suddenly put on the brakes, we'd all be flying out into space.

And so how did God do this? It's a real problem for those who have a small concept of God. But if your concept of God is correct, you have no problem at all. He could have done it in any of many different ways.

He could have actually taken the sun back. Or he could have stopped the earth and reversed the orbit for just a little bit and then spun it again. How is it that the earth does spin on its axis and remains pretty constant through the centuries? By what momentum does the earth continue to spin and has continued to spin? Who started it spinning to begin with? Who gave it the initial flip to get it going? And so if your concept of God is a biblical concept, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

He measures the heavens with the span of his right hand. I mean, that's a pretty big God. How big is the universe? We're not sure.

We're still discovering galaxies that are out there further than we thought there was anything at all. Fifteen billion light years, perhaps. Maybe we'll discover further galaxies.

You ask God, how big is your universe? He says, oh, it's that big. Measured it out. When I measured the universe, it is.

That's a pretty big God. So you see, he could do things any number of ways that he might desire. And so I have no problem with this verse.

Because my concept of God allows him to do anything. And thus, I have no problem with this. It's only those people who have that narrowed concept of God that find great difficulties with verses like this.

And I feel sorry for them. So the writing of Hezekiah, the king of Judah, when he had been sick and was recovered of his sickness. This is sort of the song that he wrote when he recovered from this sickness.

He thought he was going to die. And so when he recovered, he wrote this song. I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave.

I'm deprived of the rest to do of my years. I'm being cut off too early. It's too short.

I said, I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord in the land of the living. I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world. I'm going to be wiped out.

I'm not going to be able to go into the temple of the Lord. I won't be there with the people of God anymore. My age has departed.

It's removed from me as a shepherd's tent. I've been cut off like the weaver. And I have cut off like a weaver my life.

And he will cut me off with pining sickness. From day even tonight will thou make an end of me. It's all over.

I'm so young and yet it's all over. And so he said, I reckon till morning that as a lion, so will he break all my bones. From day even tonight will he make an end of me.

I'm going to be destroyed. And so he said, like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter. Perhaps he was having chills, you know, just teeth chattering like a crane or a swallow.

I did mourn as a dove groaning and mourning on his bed. My eyes fail with looking upward. Oh Lord, I'm oppressed undertake for me.

What shall I say? He hath both spoken unto me and himself he has done it. And so I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul. God heard me.

He responded. And so I will live carefully before him. Oh Lord, by these things men live.

And in all of these things is the life of my spirit. And so will you recover me and make me to live. The promise that God was going to heal him.

Behold for peace. I had great bitterness. But you in your love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption.

And you have cast all of my sins behind my back. Oh, that's glorious. Lord, you've forgiven my sins.

You've cast them behind my back. For the grave cannot praise thee. Death cannot celebrate thee.

They that go down to the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The idea of the resurrection of the dead was not fully developed really in the Old Testament. There was thoughts of it.

There was talk of it. And yet there was not a full understanding until Jesus rose from the dead. So the living, the living, he shall praise thee as I do this day.

The father to the children shall make known your truth. The Lord was ready to save me. Therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments in all the days of our life in the house of the Lord.

So I wrote this to be sung. A rejoicing in the healing that God gave to him. And then the extending of his life when he was dying and really had given up for dead.

God extended his life. And so the rejoicing of his heart for this, the song that he wrote that was to be sung. Among the congregation of the people accompanied by stringed instruments.

For Isaiah had said, let them take a lump of figs, a polis and lay it for a polis on the boil and he shall recover. So Hezekiah also had said, what is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord? And the sign was the dial going back, the sundial going back 10 degrees. Now at the time of his recovery, Merodach Baladan, who was the son of Baladan, the king of Babylon.

He sent letters and a present to Hezekiah to congratulate him in the healing. Because he had heard that he was sick and that he had recovered. And Hezekiah was glad for these emissaries that had come from Babylon.

And he showed them the house of his treasury. All of the treasure of Israel, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious ointment. All of the house of his armor and all that was found in his treasures.

There was nothing in his house nor in all of his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them. Here were these emissaries from Babylon coming to congratulate him on his healing. And Hezekiah says, oh, you know, take a look at the glory of my kingdom.

Here's all of my treasures and here's all of our weapons and, you know, the power and all. And showed them all off to this son of the king of Babylon. So then Isaiah the prophet came to Hezekiah and he said unto him, what did these men say to you? And where did they come from? And Hezekiah said, they are come from a far country unto me, even from Babylon.

Isaiah said, what have they seen in your house? And Hezekiah answered, they've seen everything that is in my house. There is nothing among my treasures that I have not showed them. And so Isaiah said to Hezekiah, hear the word of the Lord of hosts.

Behold, the days will come that all that is in your house and that which your fathers have laid up in store, the treasures that they have stored up to this day, they will be carried to Babylon and nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. Foolish. You see, again, maybe he'd have been better off to have died.

The next 15 years were rather disastrous for him and the nation. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which you will beget, the posterity, they will take them away as captive. Daniel was one of the descendants of Hezekiah that was taken by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, to be a eunuch in the palace of the king of Babylon.

He was there as a counselor. Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, good is the word of the Lord. There is something in Hezekiah to be admired.

God has pronounced a judgment and he acknowledges what God does is right. Good is the word of the Lord. And that's hard to do when the word has come in such judgment like that, when it's very severe.

When God says, oh, I'm going to bless you, I'm going to do all this. You say, oh, good is the word of the Lord. But when God lays a heavy on you, to then acknowledge, well, good is the word of the Lord.

It's a real faith in God. What God says is right, what God says is good. He accepted the judgment that was pronounced upon his folly.

And he said, moreover, for there shall be peace and truth in my days. So he will live out his life in peace. But following him, bad times are coming.

His descendants will be carried away captive. All of the treasure of Jerusalem will be carried away to Babylon. Lord, face to face, Lord, let me see you.

Again, that's tape or CD number C-3259. As we come to a close in today's program, we'd like to discuss the true meaning of Christmas and why a man born 2,000 years ago can still affect the world today. Do you know the prophecies that were fulfilled in Jesus' birth and death and why they had to take place? The word for today presents two Bible studies by Pastor Chuck Smith entitled Tidings of Great Joy and The Purpose of His Coming, discussing the reasons why Jesus was born, including the fulfillment of prophecy and the historic background.

In the Christmas season, there is so much focus on presents that we may forget the greatest gift of all, God's only beloved Son, our Savior. Pastor Chuck examines the birth of Christ and leaves no room for doubt that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah. To order Tidings of Great Joy and The Purpose of His Coming by Pastor Chuck Smith, call the word for today at 1-800-272-WORD or write to us at P.O. Box 8000, Costa Mesa, California, 92628.

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And now, with a few closing comments, here is Pastor Chuck. Father, we thank you for that finished work of Jesus Christ, who once and for all offered himself as the sacrifice for our sins, that he might reconcile us, Lord, unto you through the blood of the cross and make us children of God. Lord, we thank you that you were willing to bear our sins, that you were wounded and pierced for our transgressions, you were crushed for our iniquities.

Lord, may we walk in the glorious light of the gospel. Lord, let me love you face to face.

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