

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 4 December 2022. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Strength of God, and the Stripes of Men

Matthew 1:10

In **Hebrews 12:5-6**, the Bible says, *“Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, saying, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.”* Every day, God uses chastisement to break people’s stubborn will, so that they might see their need of repentance and salvation. He also uses chastisement to make *saved* people see *their* errors, so that they will stay cleansed from sin, and keep in right fellowship with Him.

So it was with the ancestors of our Lord Jesus Christ. When God promised David that the Messiah would spring from his lineage, He also assured him that if and when any of his royal descendants sinned against Him, He would *“chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men.”* This morning, we will learn about some ancestors of Jesus who were chastened in love—either so that they might be saved, or that they might get right with Him.

The title of this message is *The Strength of God, and the Stripes of Men.*

Read Matthew 1:1-10.

I. Hezekiah—the righteous king who humbled himself

At this point in **Matthew 1**, we come to one of the most righteous ancestors of our Lord Jesus Christ. His name was **Hezekiah**; and he came to the throne of Judah in **726 B.C.** His name, “Hezekiah,” is made up of the word *khazaq* (which means “he strengthens”), and *Jah* (which is short for “Jehovah”). His name, then, means **“Jehovah strengthens.”** As we will see, God truly strengthened Hezekiah, because Hezekiah loved and trusted in the God of Israel.

Read 2 Kings 18:1-8.

As is often the case with the kings of Judah, we are not told who influenced Hezekiah to place his faith in the Lord. Hezekiah had a very wicked father, who was into the deepest, darkest kind of sorcery and idolatry; and you may be sure that because of his father’s sorceries, there were powerful satanic forces at work in the royal household, trying to push Hezekiah into the same path that his father had taken. Yet, someone in the royal house taught Hezekiah the way of salvation; and he responded to the LORD at an early age.

Though the iniquity of the fathers is often visited on the children of the third and fourth generation, it doesn’t *have* to be this way—if a person will personally repent of his sin, and turn to God. In **Ezekiel 18:4** God said, *“Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.”* (In other words, everyone is *personally* accountable to God for his own sin, and not for his father’s sin.) The Lord went on to say that if a man be *“just”* before God, then *“he shall surely live.”* Yet, if that same just man have a son who is a robber, a shedder of blood, an adulterer, an extortioner, and an idolater, then *“he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him.”* Yet, if that wicked man *“beget a son, that seeth all his father’s sins which he hath done, and considereth, and doeth not such like...he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live.”*

In the last several generations before the destruction of Judah, the throne vacillated back and forth between righteous kings and unrighteous kings; yet, whenever a king chose to humble himself before God, God accepted him, and used him for His glory (even if he *did* have a wicked father). So it was with Hezekiah. With this in mind, let's take a look at what Hezekiah did to try to bring the wicked people of Judah back to God.

Read 2 Chronicles 29:3-5, 10-11, 15-19 / 30:1, 5-6, 15, 23, 27 / 31:1.

As you can see, Hezekiah was doing everything in his power to turn the people's hearts back to God. He wasn't approaching this matter casually; he was doing it with all his might. For the last several generations, and throughout Isaiah's own lifetime, prophets such as **Amos, Joel, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah** had been increasingly prophesying the destruction of both Northern Israel *and* Judah. Hezekiah didn't know how long God might withhold His judgment; but he was doing his best to turn the people back to the LORD, so that this judgment might be delayed. He tried to reach out to Northern Israel, as well. He invited the ten northern tribes to come to the big Passover celebration in the first year of his reign; but for the most part, the people mocked and derided Hezekiah's messengers. Little did they know that in only a few years (in 722 B.C.), their nation would be destroyed by Assyria!

Now, you'd think that God would have allowed a righteous king like Hezekiah to have a very long, healthy life, so that he could accomplish as much good as possible. However, that didn't appear to be God's plan. In the thirteenth year of Hezekiah's reign, God allowed Hezekiah to become grievously ill; and soon, his life was hanging in the balance. Why was God allowing this to happen? There didn't seem to be any good answer. Hezekiah cried out to God for mercy, and said, ***"The grave cannot praise thee, death can not celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth."*** It was in response to this prayer, and to the prophet Isaiah's prayer, that God performed one of the greatest miracles in history. Not only did God miraculously heal Hezekiah's body, and guarantee him 15 more years of life, but He also threw in a miracle that affected the *entire cosmos*.

Read 2 Kings 20:1-11.

Hezekiah was given an incredible privilege. In the 6,000 years of human history, this is the only time that the sun has moved backward in the heavens; and God did this just to prove to Hezekiah that He would heal him of his sickness! By the way, God didn't cause the *earth* to *rotate* backward, so that it would *appear* that the sun was moving backward; He made the *sun* to move backward! The Scriptures consistently state that the earth does *not* move out of its place, but rather that it ***"abideth* (remains still) *forever."*** In contrast, we are told that the sun is like a ***"strong man"*** in a race, and that its ***"circuit"*** (its circular path) is from ***"the end of the heaven."*** We've all been taught that the earth revolves around the sun; but the Bible clearly indicates that the sun revolves around the earth!

Now, how did Hezekiah respond to this great miracle? Sad to say, he did not respond well. You see, God often tests His children; but He doesn't test us merely with *afflictions*. He also tests us with *prosperity*. Shortly after Hezekiah recovered (sometime in the 13th year of his reign), an embassy from King Merodach-baladan of Babylon came to visit Hezekiah, because they had heard that he had been sick, and had recovered. (No doubt, the word had also gotten out to surrounding nations that the incredible miracle of the sun moving backward was performed by Israel's God.) This was a golden opportunity for Hezekiah to brag on his God,

and to be a witness for Him! But did he do this? No, he did not. Instead, he took the opportunity to brag on himself, and to show off his riches, and the glory of his kingdom.

Read 2 Kings 20:12-19.

In light of everything that we've read about Hezekiah up to this point, his behaviour, at this point in his life, seems very "out of character," doesn't it? Yet, there it is, painfully recorded for all to see. Beware, Christian! This is how *any* believer can become, when he forgets that his material wealth, health, and prosperity are gifts from God, and not the result of his own wisdom. What happened to Isaiah can happen to you, if you do not humble yourself under the mighty hand of God every day. By the way, did you notice how nonchalant Hezekiah was when Isaiah told him that the day was coming when Judah would be destroyed, and when the people of Judah, including his own sons, would be carried away as captives to Babylon? His attitude seemed to be, "Oh, well. I know it won't happen in *my* day. As long as the good times keep rolling in *my* lifetime, that's all that matters." That is what pride does to a person!

However, Isaiah's pride was about to be dealt with. God doesn't let His children get away with pride and spiritual indifference. **Hebrews 12:5-6** says, "*Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, saying, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*" God had promised David that if any of his royal descendants sinned against Him, he would "*chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men*"; and that's what He was preparing to do with Hezekiah. In **2 Chronicles 32**, we are told that after Hezekiah's sickness and recovery, he "*rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; but his heart was lifted up: therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem. Notwithstanding Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah.*"

What was God preparing to do in order to humble Hezekiah, and the nation of Judah? It's simple: God was about to allow Assyria, the "super-power" in the region, to come up against Judah. As we've already seen, it was in the thirteenth year of Hezekiah's reign that he was sick, and recovered, and when the embassy from Babylon visited him; and within less than a year (in the 14th year of Hezekiah's reign), **Sennacherib**, the King of Assyria, came up against Judah, and besieged *all* the fortified cities of Judah. The land was literally filled with the Assyrian army; and they had no recourse. Therefore, Hezekiah sent a message to Sennacherib, and told him, "*I have offended; return from me: that which thou puttest upon me I will bear.*" This was a far cry from Hezekiah's previous political position. Earlier in his reign, when he was trusting God, he had *stopped* paying tribute to the king of Assyria, as his father Ahaz had done; and in all those years, the king of Assyria had done nothing about it. But now, all of a sudden, Hezekiah found himself backed up against the wall, and pleading with Sennacherib to put him under tribute again, if he would only "go away." Hezekiah had to agree to pay Sennacherib 300 talents of silver, and 30 talents of gold. (By the way, this is recorded in the Assyrian records, as well. Sennacherib bragged, in his annals, about how he had besieged **46 cities** of Judah, and had taken **200,150 captives**, and trapped "the overbearing and proud" Hezekiah within the walls of Jerusalem "like a caged bird.") Hezekiah had to take all the gold and silver vessels from the Temple, and the gold from the Temple doors, and even all the treasures in his own house, to pay the king of Assyria. Ouch! Pride is costly, folks!

However, this wasn't the end of God's dealing with Hezekiah. Four years after this first invasion (in 709 B.C.), Assyria invaded again. You see, Hezekiah had, once again, stopped

paying tribute to Assyria; however, it wasn't his faith in God that emboldened him to do this. Scripture tells us that Hezekiah went to Taharqa, the king of Egypt, for support against the king of Assyria. (The Assyrian annals record this alliance, as well.) When Sennacherib heard about Hezekiah's alliance with Egypt, he was furious. This time, Sennacherib was demanding, as the condition for being allowed to *live*, that Judah disband as a nation, and allow themselves to be deported out of their land! The situation couldn't have been more dire!

Read 2 Chronicles 32:1, 6-21.

Hezekiah had become filled with pride; but now he was very humbled. In despair, he cried out to God. (In **2 Kings** and **Isaiah**, we are given the contents of this prayer.) And guess what? God answered him! Here in **2 Chronicles**, we are told that God sent an angel to "**cut off all the mighty men of valour**" in Sennacherib's army; but in **2 Kings 19:35**, we are told the exact details: God slew **185,000 Assyrian soldiers** in one night! Sennacherib was forced to leave Judah in utter defeat; and later, his own two sons murdered him while he was worshipping in the house of his god Nisroch. God intervened, and saved Hezekiah from the most powerful empire of that day, because Hezekiah humbled himself. God also did not allow Hezekiah to be overthrown, because He had promised to preserve the royal line of the Messiah!

II. Manasseh—the prodigal who came home

(**Read Matthew 1:10 again.**) The next man in the line of the Messiah is **Manasseh**, the son of Hezekiah. Manasseh was the longest-reigning king of Judah; but he was also the most vile and wicked of the kings, by far. Manasseh came to the throne at age 12: and his 55-year reign was filled with wickedness. He re-built all the idolatrous high places and altars, and filled the land with idols and groves. He filled the *Temple of God itself* with idols. He made his sons to pass through the fire, and was deep into astrology, wizardry, and spiritism. He murdered children in infant sacrifice, and shed much innocent blood. How did he become so evil? We don't really know, because Scripture doesn't tell us. Perhaps his dad was so busy with affairs of state, that he didn't take the time to guard his son's heart, and to teach him the ways of the LORD. On the other hand, perhaps his dad *did* pour himself into his son, and *did* teach him the ways of the LORD, yet his son *still* rebelled, and chose to follow the wicked example of a friend of relative who was secretly practicing idolatry. (I have known many godly people who "did everything right" in the way they brought up their kids: yet, one or two of their children *still* went off into the world.) At any rate, Judah was now on the fast-track to destruction; and through one of his prophets, God gave Judah the memo that judgment was coming. God warned them, "***I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down. And I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies...because they have done that which was evil in my sight.***"

Now, if the book of **2 Kings** were the only record that we had of Manasseh, we would assume that this vile man died in his sins, and went straight to hell. Yet, believe it or not, that is not the case! To get the whole picture of Manasseh's life, you must also read the book of **2 Chronicles**. The Bible says in **Isaiah 35**, "***Seek ye out the book of the LORD, and read: no one of these shall fail, none shall want*** (or "lack") ***her mate.***" In other words, we need to compare Scripture with Scripture. Oftentimes, there are passages of Scripture which complete, or explain, other passages of Scripture. Each Scripture has its "***mate***" (that other passage that gives the rest of the context); and to find the answers, we must be diligent students of God's Word. Let's see what else God has to say about Manasseh's life.

Read 2 Chronicles 33:1-20.

Who would have thought that such a wicked man as Manasseh would ever repent? Yet, he did! God got out that “rod” that He promised to use upon David’s descendants when they sinned; and He chastised Manasseh sorely. He allowed him to be taken away captive by the Assyrians, and imprisoned in the city of Babylon (which was under Assyria’s control). While he was there, he truly repented of his sin; and God graciously put into the mind of the king of Assyria to let Manasseh go back to Judah, and sit on his throne once more. As soon as he got home, he did everything in his power to *un-do* all the wickedness that he had done. He didn’t live long after this; but in the short time that he had, he destroyed the idols, and did his best to turn Judah back to God. When he died, he went to Paradise, with his righteous ancestors.

Now, many people consider this to be “unfair.” “How can someone commit murder, and do all kinds of horrible things, and still get into Heaven?” they say. This is the very accusation that the people of Judah made against God. They said that God’s ways were “*unequal*” (in other words, “unfair”). “If God is so righteous and holy,” they reasoned, “then how can He forgive someone who has committed great evil?” The LORD answered that question in **Ezekiel 18**. He said, “*But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed...he shall surely live, he shall not die...Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?*” God is a just God, who must punish sin; but He also delights in mercy. He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. That is why He sent His Son Jesus to pay *our* penalty for sin in *our* place, so that in exchange, we can be pardoned, and receive eternal life. God was not willing that even wicked Manasseh should perish; and when he repented of his sin, God forgave him, and saved him. The prodigal son came home!

Read Luke 15:11-24.

Those who do not understand how God could save someone like Manasseh do not understand the grace of God; and, most likely, it is because they themselves have never seen their need for God’s grace and mercy, nor experienced God’s grace in their own lives. (In other words, they’ve not been saved.) If you think you are righteous enough to get to Heaven, you are mistaken! You must admit that *you* are that “prodigal son” who has strayed from God, and that *you* are “dead” to God, and lost in sin. You must humble yourself, come to the Father through His Son Jesus, and say, “*Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee.*”

III. Amon—the king who wouldn’t humble himself

(**Read Matthew 1:10 again.**) The next man in the lineage of Jesus Christ is **Amon**, the son of Manasseh. The Bible doesn’t tell us much about Amon; but what we do know is that he did *not* follow the example of his father in the last years of his life. Manasseh responded to God’s chastisement, and humbled himself before God; but his son Amon did *not* humble himself. After two short years, he passed out of this life, and into everlasting torment.

Read 2 Chronicles 33:21-25.

My friends, the requirement for salvation has never changed. In order to be enter the Kingdom of God, you must humble yourself, and admit to God that you need His gift of salvation. In **Luke 18**, Jesus told the parable of two men who went to the Temple to pray—one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. In his prayer, the self-righteous Pharisee bragged about how he was *not* unjust, as other men are, but that he fasted twice in the week, and gave tithes of all that he possessed. But then the publican, who was a notorious cheat and liar, made his prayer. As he prayed, he wouldn’t even lift up his eyes to Heaven, because he was so ashamed of his sin. He simply cried out, “*God, be merciful to me a sinner.*” Jesus assured His hearers that it was *the publican* who went home “*justified*” (declared to be righteous). It wasn’t because he *deserved* to be justified: it was because he humbled himself, and, by faith,

received God’s gift of imputed righteousness. My friend, if you are like that Pharisee who thought he was righteous, please think again! You are a sinner in need of God’s mercy. Please repent of your sin today, and in simple faith, ask Jesus to forgive you, and save you!

IV. Josiah—the child who made a difference

Before we close today, there is one more man in Jesus’ lineage whom we will examine. His name is **Josiah**, the son of Amon. **(Read Matthew 1:10.)**

In 975 B.C., shortly after God had established Jeroboam as the king of Northern Israel, the ten northern tribes quickly turned aside to idol worship. Their king, Jeroboam, set up two golden calves in the cities of Dan and Bethel, and compelled the people to worship them; and from that point onward, the Northern Kingdom continually worshipped those calves. Because of this, God sent a prophet to Jeroboam to foretell the judgment that would one day come upon Israel because of this sin; and he specifically mentioned the name of **King Josiah**. He said, ***“O altar, altar, thus saith the LORD; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men’s bones shall be burnt upon thee.”***

As it turned out, that is precisely what happened. God used this young king named Josiah, from the house of David, to bring about Judah’s last spiritual revival. Now, we don’t know how Josiah came to faith in the LORD. Perhaps he had seen the change in his grandfather Manasseh in the last few years of his life, and decided to place *his* faith in the LORD. However, we know one thing for sure: Josiah became one of the godliest kings that Judah ever had. As he grew into manhood, he pulled out all the stops to stamp out idol worship; and, just as had been prophesied three centuries earlier, he went up to Bethel (in the territory of what *once was* the Northern Kingdom of Israel), and desecrated the very *bones* of the priests who had once offered sacrifices to the golden calves! He dug up their bones, and burned them!

Read 2 Chronicles 34:1-10, 18-31.

It had been so long since the people of Judah had heard the words of Scripture, that even Josiah had not really heard the Scriptures until the day when the priest Hilkiah found a copy of the Law of Moses, and read it to him. When Josiah heard the Scripture, he was cut to the heart. This is what God’s Word does, folks: it convicts us of our sin, and reveals that we are guilty before God, and in need of salvation. This is what Paul meant when he said that ***“By the law is the knowledge of sin.”*** Josiah now realised that Judah was in deep trouble with God, and that judgment was surely coming. When he sent his men to the prophetess Huldah to ask about Judah’s fate, she confirmed that destruction *was* coming very soon—but not in Josiah’s lifetime. Yet, even though Josiah knew that God’s judgment was coming, he still did everything he could to turn things around. First, he destroyed all the idols. However, he knew that this wasn’t enough. He needed to reach the people’s *hearts*; and he tried with all his might to do so. However, the people refused to turn to God; and as the result, God allowed Josiah to pass out of this life relatively early, so that His program of judgment could begin.

Read 2 Chronicles 35:20-27.

Why did God allow Josiah to pass away at the relatively young age of 39—especially when he was doing so much good? Was he *wrong* to get involved in this conflict with Necho? After all, it did appear that Egypt was posing a threat to his nation. (To go up north to fight Assyria, Necho’s army *had* to pass through the land of Judah.) Was Josiah acting in pride, without consulting God about this? We don’t know for sure. However, one thing is for sure: God

used Josiah's early death to set in motion His plan of *judgment* upon Judah. God had promised that the judgment would come *after* Josiah's death. Many prophetic events, stretching all the way to the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ, had to be fulfilled; but in order for all these things to happen at their appointed times, Josiah had to go to Paradise at exactly the right time, so that the last days of judgment upon Judah could begin.

Brethren, our situation today is much like that of Judah in the days of Josiah. There is only one thing that is preventing the start of the horrible seven-year Tribulation period; and that is the presence of Spirit-indwelt Christians. **Second Thessalonians 2:7** says, "***For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed.***" In other words, the Holy Spirit of God—the One who restrains sin in this world—is present in Christians; but when the Christians are taken out of this world in the Rapture, the Holy Spirit will stop restraining evil, and will allow the Antichrist to arise. Brethren, that day is coming very soon! Yet, what should we be doing until then? Should we say, "Well, our culture is too far gone. Judgment is coming, regardless of what we do; so let's just take it easy until Christ returns." No! Like Josiah, we should be doing *everything* in our power to reach souls for Christ, and to snatch them from the burning. Christian, follow the example of Josiah, and make a difference for the Lord!

Conclusion: As we close this morning, I would ask: "Have *you* received God's gift of salvation?" Maybe God is using circumstances in your life to help you see your need of Him. Maybe you haven't literally been knocked in the head, as I was; but maybe God is using "hard knocks" of other kinds to break your stubborn pride. If so, please respond to Him! Be like Manasseh, who repented in the eleventh hour—or like Josiah, who repented in the *first* hour, when his heart was young and tender. Believe on Him today! Should you be saved already, be like Hezekiah, who repented of his pride, and like Josiah, who did all he could to reach the lost. Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.