

Dear Friends,

Have you ever engaged in a discussion regarding whether or not each person is born with a divinely set and fixed time to die? Our study passage should sufficiently answer that question. God personally told King Hezekiah that he needed to set his house in order, for he would soon die. Later, after the king prayed, the Lord added fifteen years to the king's life, to whatever his "Death date" would have been, had the Lord not added those fifteen years.

Of course, the foolish debate over a set time leads to a broader question. Does God truly answer prayers? Does He actually alter the course of events in response to the genuine prayers of His children? And this same lesson should equally settle that question. How could God more clearly answer the question than by literally turning time back as a sign of His promise to add fifteen years to the king's life? How could we ask for more?

In one of the most extensive lessons on prayer, Jesus' own teaching (Luke 11:1-13), Jesus gave an analogy of human parents who lovingly give their children specific items as specifically based on the child's request, not randomly at their will. Based on this lesson alone, though it is fully supported by lessons throughout Scripture that teach the same truth, we may safely, and in godly faith, conclude that our God does indeed answer the prayers of His people with real responses of real things, based on those prayers.

Over my sixty-six years in ministry, I have experienced very specific answered prayers, I have talked with a multitude of godly people who shared their own experience of answered prayers, but most importantly, I continually read multiple accounts throughout Scripture of specifically answered prayers. I rest my case with God and His Word. Shouldn't you?

Love in Jesus,  
Joe Holder

### **Answered Prayer Adds Fifteen Years to a King's Life**

*And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the Lord. And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. (2 Kings 20:4-6 KJV 1900)*

I well recall the first conversation I ever had with a believer who sincerely believed that every person is born with a divinely set time for their death. There are several passages that mention dying before our "Time." But there are also several passages that reference "Prolonging" our days, or our study passage that quite simply tells us that God added fifteen years to Hezekiah's life. Given the reference to the fig plaster, it is likely that Hezekiah was sick from a boil or some kind of serious infection. Consider the infection and God's simple announcement to the king to set his house in order. We cannot question; the man was about to die.

*Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live. (2 Kings 20:1b)*

Invariably folks who hold to the fatalistic idea of a fixed time to die will work hard to make this simple announcement from the Lord mean what it doesn't mean or say. If God spoke these words to you today, how seriously would you take them? Would you accept their obvious meaning and start preparing for your imminent death? Or would you ignore them and go about your daily routine? Did God lie to Hezekiah when He told the king that he needed to set his house in order, for he would die? Setting his house in order specifically indicates that the king's death was imminent.

Have you ever heard a doctor tell you that you had a terminal illness? That you qualified for hospice, which means that a doctor has given a one year or less prognosis for your condition? About forty-five years ago, I lived through just such an experience with my wife. Despite the doctor's best efforts, and I'm so thankful he made the effort and that it succeeded (With, I believe, much help from our "Chief Physician"), he still wrote on her chart, "Metastatic Stage 4." I know first-hand the impact of a doctor's somber message. Some seven years after her prognosis, my wife was in her doctor's office for her annual checkup on the cancer that caused his prognosis. After he completed his review of her tests, she asked him, "Do you ever consider anyone with my history to be cured?" He smiled, sat down, and talked with her for several minutes. His opening words were "You do understand that you've lived much longer than we expected." Or something to that effect. That was over forty-five years ago, so she did much better than Hezekiah did! I can only imagine the weight of that message coming from the Lord Himself to Hezekiah. It is not a message to tease or to twist and try to make it mean something different. It is a simple and clear message. "Set your house in order. Your death is imminent."

Only a short time before, the Lord had answered Hezekiah's prayer and delivered Israel and him from the Assyrians, so Hezekiah stood on firm ground to believe that God heard and answered prayers. I fear that too often we begin our thoughts of prayer with the preconception that God does not—and will not—answer prayer, but we'll go through the motions just in case. And, going into prayer with that attitude, we wonder why our prayers are not answered. Really?

A few years ago I read of an old survey of Puritan Christians in England. They were taught to make a written list of everything they prayed for. Every few weeks they were also told to go back over that list and make notations of every request that had been granted. They consistently reported between sixty and seventy percent answered prayer! I regard that as a powerful incentive for us to pray with serious intent and expectation.

When dealing with this question of answered—or unanswered—prayer, believers in our culture face two extreme and unbiblical ideas. First, there is the fatalistic idea that God has fixed every event in human history, so prayer never changes anything. I often wonder when examining this idea; if these folks truly believe what they claim to believe, why does the Bible teach us to pray at all? It is useless and, therefore, senseless. God tells you to do something, but He also tells you that it serves no real purpose, for He shall never answer your prayer or change anything because you prayed. The idea reduces both the Bible, God's Book, and God Himself, to a robotic cosmic puppeteer, as well as a deceitful charlatan. You dangle on his strings at his whim.

Secondly, if you talk to the common "Christian" of the day, you shall eventually—likely soon—encounter the modern "Name it and claim it" Christian. All you need to do is tell God what you want, and he is obligated to give it to you. This idea reduces God to the near-mindless parent who spoils his children by giving them everything they request, whether they need it or not, whether it might harm or help them. Just give them what they want.

When Jesus taught one of the most extensive lessons recorded in His own words on the subject of prayer, (Luke 11:1-13) He taught us that God is a wise and caring Father to His family. If we go to Him with our needs, He shall supply them. In the examples Jesus gave, a son needed, and requested bread, fish, and an egg. In each case—and this is Jesus' story that He told to teach us His disposition of our prayers—the father gave what the son needed. The son requested bread. He didn't demand authentic, fresh baked San Francisco sourdough bread. The son requested fish. He didn't demand sushi grade ahi. If God remains as rigid as a stone when we pray, Jesus would have taught a different lesson. In each case, the father responded with wise love to the need of his child. And, in Verse 13, Jesus emphasized His conclusion to the lesson. This is the point He intended to teach by it.

*If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your*

*heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him? (Luke 11:13 KJV)*

Jesus not only taught the disciples—and us—that He would answer our prayers with very specific things that we request, but that He does so in a far greater degree than an earthly parent, “...**how much more**....”

Based on this lesson, consistent with every other lesson on prayer in Scripture, we may confidently pray to the Lord, knowing that He will not bless us one day with the things we requested, and send us the opposite things that do us harm the very next day. God is not double-minded. He is faithfully and consistently good to His people. He never “Wakes up on the wrong side of the bed in a bad mood.” He never plays games with us by doing good to us one moment and reversing Himself and doing us harm the next. This is the unbiblical dilemma of folks who believe that God causes everything that occurs, either actively or permissively. According to Scripture’s faithful report, our God, as our loving and gracious Father, is ever and only good to His people. He never does wickedly to you, nor does He ever cause you to do wickedly.

I’m reminded of a legal term, but it applies to our study, “Good faith.” If God does not answer prayer, if He in no way alters the course of events based on prayer, the multiple Bible accounts of answered prayer, and altered events as a result, such as our present study passage, and the multiple Bible lessons that teach us to pray with stated assurance of the Lord’s answering, leave us in an ethical quandary. It effectively charges God with teaching us to pray in “Bad faith.” He teaches us to do something with a stated specific promise of certain results, but He has no intention of honoring His promise to produce those results. Such is the tangled web of confusion when people ignore the Bible’s teaching in favor of their own ideas.

I wonder. If Hezekiah was alive today, and if you were to ask him if he believed in answered prayer, how might he respond? “Yes, sir! I believe in answered prayers. I’m alive today because of answered prayers.” How many of us are also alive today, literally so, because the Lord answered a prayer that we or a loved one prayed when we were in the midst of a health crisis or other danger?

Immediately following our study passage, Hezekiah asks for a sign from the Lord to affirm the Lord’s intent to add fifteen years to his life. Verses 8-11 in this chapter indicate that the king requested, and the Lord granted that the shadow on the sundial would go back, literally, reverse time, by ten degrees on the dial. And some folks claim God doesn’t respond to the prayers of His people by actually altering events. How about if God actually turned back time! Would that convince you? Well, that is precisely what our God did for King Hezekiah. How could God do more to assure His people of His loving and gracious care for them, and of His active intervention and altering of events for them and for their spiritual needs?

*I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David’s sake.* We should always remember. Even though we pray for something, the Lord may grant our request, but for the benefit of someone else. The Lord didn’t tell Hezekiah that He would defend Jerusalem for Hezekiah’s sake, but for His own sake, and for the sake of David, implying His promise of ongoing blessings to David’s lineage. We typically end our prayers “In Jesus’ name and for His sake.” Do you ever think why you use this term? The “Name” of Jesus encapsulates everything about Him and His person. By ending our prayer with these words, we claim that what we requested in the prayer is for His sake, and not ours. Do we truly mean that? Should we not be content and joyful that God grants our request for His own honor and name’s sake? Praise God! Could it be that we would improve our prayer outlook, as well as our faith outlook, if we thought and prayed with the conviction that whatever we request that truly honors the Lord, is for His sake, and is also what will most bless us and supply our needs?

We may think such miracles as we read of Hezekiah’s experience are well and good for the long ago. However, Scripture brings the same truth to us for our own lives. “**That it may be well with thee, and**

*thou mayest live long on the earth.*” (Ephesians 6:3) God doesn’t turn time back for us, but He does promise to extend our personal life-clock if we honor Him and His commandments toward our families.

Elder Joe Holder