

How Quickly Things Can Change

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After Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians, the southern nation of Judah continued to exist. While Judah had periods of faithfulness, they were often as wicked and idolatrous as Israel. Thankfully, something positive came from Israel's punishment. During the reign of Hezekiah, the nation of Judah sought spiritual restoration to the Lord (2 Kings 18-20; 2 Chron. 29-32).

Hezekiah was raised by a wicked and ungodly father: Ahaz. Ahaz worshipped idols. His abhorrent godlessness was most notoriously displayed when He murdered some of his sons. He offered them as sacrifices to his idols. Without regard for the Creator, man has no regard for the sanctity of human life. Additionally, there was terrible political instability during Ahaz's reign. Hezekiah had a tumultuous youth.

Stunningly, despite Hezekiah's terrible upbringing, he sought to restore Judah. In the first year of his rule, Hezekiah took drastic measures to initiate spiritual restoration in Judah. Hezekiah destroyed the high places of idolatry and destroyed the brazen serpent of Moses (this had been co-opted as an instrument of idolatry). Also, Hezekiah reeducated and cleansed the priesthood, sanctified and repaired the Temple, invited Israel and Judah to observe the Passover together, and reinstated tithing (2 Chron. 29-31). In a single year, the nation of Judah began to faithfully serve God.

Hezekiah's process of spiritual restoration of Judah took a great amount of dedication, thoughtful planning, and hard work. The restoration was not easy; however, the restoration took place in a relatively short period of time. Hezekiah broke a generational cycle of sin.

Certainly, Hezekiah's path of restoration is encouraging to us. He demonstrates what we can accomplish in our lives spiritually. We can make a change for the better.

Sadly, everyone does not come from a godly family. Like Hezekiah's family, some have had fathers and grandfathers who were ungodly. Someone who comes from such a background begins life in a spiritual deficit. God expects faithfulness to be taught and exemplified through the family (Deut. 6).

Of course, this does not always happen. Perhaps a person coming from a spiritually dysfunctional family thinks they will never be able to change the course of their life and family. Hezekiah proves the possibilities of change for the better. A generational cycle of sin can be broken if we, like Hezekiah, set our hearts on serving God. If we dedicate ourselves to God and His word, He will help us in our endeavors. Remember, Jesus said, "*with God all things are possible*" (Matt. 19:26).

Change for the Worse

Well, just as things can quickly change for the better, things can quickly change for the worse. While he led a spiritual revolution in Judah, the end of Hezekiah's life was troubled. He struggled with pride; however, there is no indication of the nation returning to idolatry. After Hezekiah's death, Judah was led back into idolatry by his son, Manasseh. He began to reign at the age of twelve. Certainly, he was advised and directed by others within the government in his youth. By the time he reached adulthood, Manasseh was a godless and wicked man. Notice the differences between Hezekiah and Manasseh:

1. Hezekiah destroyed the high places of idolatry. Manasseh rebuilt the high places of idolatry.
2. While the images of Baal had been ground into nothing by Hezekiah, Manasseh had the images of Baal recast.
3. Hezekiah cleansed the Temple; whereas, Manasseh desecrated the Temple. He built altars for idol worship in the Temple.
4. Hezekiah rejected the human sacrifices offered by his father, Ahaz; whereas, Manasseh inhumanely sacrificed his son.
5. Hezekiah sought to rule the nation by the Law of Moses, as King David had done. Manasseh consulted witchcraft and fortune-tellers for advice (2 Kings 21:1-8; 2 Chron. 33:1-10).
6. Hezekiah was associated with David, a man after God's heart; whereas, Manasseh was associated with wicked king Ahab.

Yes, things changed quickly for the worse in the nation of Judah. Manasseh's wickedness is cautionary. Our parents may have served the Lord faithfully. If we do not seek the Lord as they, we will quickly digress. Such fast change for the worse is possible in life. Paul warned, *"Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall"* (1 Cor. 10:12).

Likewise, we may faithfully serve God and teach our children by word and example; yet, our children may rebel against everything sacred and holy. Perhaps the legacy of Hezekiah and Manasseh needs to be taught to our children. One or two bad decisions can take us away from the Lord (Heb. 2:1).

Conclusion

How quickly things can change. We can be encouraged to know that change can happen for the better. Those struggling to break a generational cycle of sin can take courage from the restoration led by Hezekiah. A troubled family background does not have to define us spiritually.

The story of the Bible involves God making something beautiful out of a mess. Whether it was a slave nation, a battered and beaten apostle, or us, God can make something out of nothing. No matter how unsolvable the problems of our lives or our families may appear, God can change us for the better. By the power of the Gospel, God can make function out of our dysfunction (2 Cor. 12:10).

At the same time, Manasseh's quick change for the worse is cautionary. We can quickly ruin and destroy ourselves spiritually if we choose. We must carefully build on the foundation that has been laid for us by Jesus Christ and the many faithful of the past (Matt. 7:24-27; 1 Cor. 3:9-15; Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:4-10). Faithfulness is not a forgone conclusion from generation to generation.