

Isaiah Series Part 14

Chapter 38:2-3 expansion

“To have a faithful, whole heart toward God”
Hezekiah's Plea

Introduction

With Jerusalem under siege, and Hezekiah given a death sentence, Hezekiah weeps this plea toward his God: (Isaiah 38:2-3)

Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, and said, “Please, O Lord, remember how I have walked before you **in faithfulness** and **with a whole heart**, and have done what is good in your sight.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

Introduction

What is it to walk in faithfulness and with a whole heart?

What does salvation have to do with the heart?

What if my life has not been perfect?

The Declaration of Death (38:1–3)

A. Historical Context

Hezekiah ruled Judah during the late eighth century B.C., a time of political turmoil and Assyrian dominance. His father Ahaz had rejected Isaiah's counsel and trusted human alliances; Hezekiah, by contrast, trusted the LORD (2 Kings 18:5).

John N. Oswalt notes that the king's illness likely occurred shortly before Jerusalem's deliverance from Assyria in 701 B.C.—a private crisis that paralleled the nation's public one. Whether palace or nation, the issue was the same: *Will you trust Yahweh when everything seems terminal?*

The Declaration of Death (38:1–3)

B. The Prophetic Word

The Hebrew command *šawwê bêtkā* (“—צִנֵּה בֵּיתְךָ “set your house in order”—means to prepare one’s household and affairs for death. The double clause, “you shall die and not live,” underscores the finality of the sentence.

Hezekiah responds with honest anguish: he turns his face to the wall, prays, and weeps bitterly. In turning his face, he turns away from courtly onlookers toward the One who alone can reverse the decree.

The Declaration of Death (38:1–3)

C. The Prayer of the Faithful

Hezekiah pleads, “Remember, O LORD, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart.” This is not self-righteousness but covenant language—an appeal to relationship.

Oswalt comments, “Hezekiah’s prayer does not manipulate God; it confesses relationship. He speaks as a covenant partner seeking mercy, not merit.” Motyer agrees: “His tears were not tokens of unbelief but of a heart that takes God with utmost seriousness.”

Application: Every believer must eventually face the decree, “Set your house in order.” Faith does not spare us from mortality, but it transforms how we meet it. When death knocks, the faithful turn toward God, not away from Him.

In Faithfulness and with a Whole Heart

A. Works / Performance vs Loyal Heart

Covenant Relationship vs Individualism

Example: Who is Paul talking to regarding the Temple of the Holy Spirit?

“Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple?”

1 Corinthians 3:16

In Faithfulness and with a Whole Heart

Heiser's Concept of Loyal Love and Covenant Faithfulness

Michael Heiser, especially in *The Unseen Realm* and *What Does God Want?*, reframes **faith** (Heb. *emunah*) as **loyal allegiance** to God rather than merely intellectual assent.

He notes that biblical salvation is **covenantal**—rooted in relationship, not ritual.

For Heiser:

“Belief in God is more than acknowledging He exists; it is loyalty to Him as the only true God.”
(*The Unseen Realm*, ch. 40)

In Faithfulness and with a Whole Heart

Heiser argues that salvation has always involved **loyalty of the heart**—a trust that produces obedience. This fits the biblical pattern:

Abraham's faith was expressed through covenant loyalty
(Gen 15:6; 22:12).

Israel's unfaithfulness was called *spiritual adultery*—a betrayal of loyalty
(Hos 2; Deut 32:15–18).

Jesus demands allegiance that surpasses external obedience (Matt 6:24; 10:37–39).

Thus, for Heiser, *lawlessness* (ἀνομία) in Matthew 7:23 is the opposite of **loyalty**—it is betrayal of divine allegiance while wearing a religious mask.

In Faithfulness and with a Whole Heart

Sin vs Lawlessness

Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophecy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.

Matthew 7:21-23 ESV

In Faithfulness and with a Whole Heart

A. Sin and Lawlessness Compared: Theological Progression

Heiser sees a progression between the two concepts:

Stage	Description	Theological Implication
1. Sin (ḥaṭṭā'th)	Missing the mark, failing to obey	May involve ignorance or weakness
2. Rebellion (pāša')	Conscious defiance	A choice to resist divine authority
3. Lawlessness (anomia)	Ongoing rejection of God's order	Total disloyalty and spiritual anarchy

Thus, by the time Jesus calls someone a “*worker of lawlessness*,” Heiser would say they are not simply sinners; they are **habitual traitors** to God's kingdom—people who have set themselves up as their own lawgivers.

In Faithfulness and with a Whole Heart

A. France on “workers of lawlessness”

The irony of religious activity without obedience

The people Jesus condemns are not outsiders—they are those who call him “*Lord, Lord*” and even claim to perform miracles in his name (vv. 21–22).

France stresses that the issue is not a lack of religious zeal or spectacular ministry. Instead, the problem is that their lives lack alignment with the Father’s will (v. 21).

Thus, calling them “*workers of lawlessness*” exposes the contradiction: their impressive spiritual works mask a deeper rebellion against God’s rule.

In Faithfulness and with a Whole Heart

A. France on “workers of lawlessness”

The relational rupture—“I never knew you”

France underlines that what is lacking is a genuine relationship with Jesus. Their religious performance does not equate to covenant faithfulness.

“Lawlessness” here is not only moral corruption but the deeper failure to live under the authority of Christ. They practiced religion but not discipleship.

In Faithfulness and with a Whole Heart

B. Oswalt on “lawlessness” in Isaiah

Lawlessness as covenant treachery

For Oswalt, Israel’s failure is that they seek security in rituals, alliances, or appearances, but their lives betray covenant unfaithfulness (cf. Isa 29:13: “This people draw near with their mouth... while their hearts are far from me”).

“Lawlessness” here means living as though God’s law and lordship do not matter, even while maintaining a façade of worship.

In Faithfulness and with a Whole Heart

C. Motyer on “lawlessness” in Isaiah

The perversion of justice

Motyer (*The Prophecy of Isaiah*) frequently highlights that Israel’s “iniquity” or “lawlessness” manifests in **injustice, dishonesty, and oppression of the vulnerable** (Isa 5:18–23; 10:1–2).

Lawlessness is not just “breaking rules” but **turning God’s moral order upside down**—calling evil good and good evil.

In Faithfulness and with a Whole Heart

“Workers of Lawlessness” as the Disloyal

When Jesus says, “*Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness,*” He is not rejecting sinners who struggle but those whose **hearts remain unloyal** despite their religious appearance.

They perform works “in His name” but serve their own agenda (self-rule).

Their obedience is instrumental, not relational—using God’s name without allegiance to His kingship.

Jesus’ “I never knew you” parallels the prophetic cry against covenant breakers who “knew” God in ritual but not in love or loyalty (cf. Hos 6:6; Isa 1:11–17).

In Faithfulness and with a Whole Heart

Hence, salvation is **not earned by moral performance** but **proven by covenant loyalty**—
a relational obedience springing from love.

We are a covenant People!



What does salvation have to do with the heart?

The Heart as the Seat of Loyalty

Heiser frequently explains that in the Old Testament, *faith* means **covenant loyalty**, and the “heart” is where that loyalty resides.

“God isn’t looking for perfect moral performance; He’s looking for loyalty. The heart is where allegiance lives.”

—Heiser, *What Does God Want?*, ch. 5

What does salvation have to do with the heart?

For Heiser, **loyalty is the heart's orientation toward God**—the choice to trust Him alone rather than other powers, idols, or self-rule. Thus, salvation involves a transfer of allegiance. The heart turns from rebellion (*lawlessness*) to loyalty (*faithfulness*).

Deuteronomy 6:5 – “Love the Lord your God with all your heart...” is, for Heiser, a statement of total covenant loyalty.

1 Samuel 16:7 – God looks on the heart, because external obedience can mask internal disloyalty.

Heiser stresses that **Yahweh saves those whose hearts are loyal to Him**, not merely those who observe ritual law (cf. 2 Chr 16:9).

What does salvation have to do with the heart?

The Heart and the Indwelling Spirit

Heiser highlights the prophetic promises of a transformed heart (Deut 30:6; Ezek 36:26–27). The Holy Spirit's indwelling presence marks the **restoration of loyal hearts**.

The Spirit enables believers to remain faithful and obedient—not through coercion, but by inner transformation.

This fulfills the covenant hope that God would “circumcise the heart” so His people could love Him fully.

“The indwelling Spirit is God's answer to the heart's disloyalty problem.”

—Heiser, *Angels and Demons* Q&A, podcast episode

In short, salvation is a **heart renewal**—a reorientation of allegiance, empowered by the Spirit.

What does salvation have to do with the heart?

Salvation is the restoration of heart loyalty to the true God. The heart is the covenant center—where belief becomes allegiance, and allegiance becomes obedience. Salvation does not bypass the heart; it begins there, transforms it, and through it, renews the whole person.

What if my life is not perfect?

Salvation Is About Loyalty, Not Perfection

God never expected human perfection, because the entire biblical story assumes human weakness and failure. What God looks for is **a loyal heart**, not flawless performance.

“God knows we’ll fail. He wants us to keep turning our loyalty back to Him when we do.”

—Heiser, *What Does God Want?*, ch. 7

What if my life is not perfect?

Salvation can be described as belonging to God's family — a covenant relationship entered by faith (**loyal trust**) and sustained by repentance (**loyal return**).

The **loyal heart** may stumble, but it never transfers allegiance.
The **lawless heart** may look religious, but it serves self or idols.
In short, **loyalty doesn't mean sinlessness; it means persistence in faithfulness** — returning to Yahweh every time you fail.

What if my life is not perfect?

Biblical Foundation: The Imperfect but Loyal

It's important to point out that nearly every hero of faith was morally flawed but relationally loyal:

Abraham lied and doubted yet remained loyal to Yahweh's call.

David committed grievous sins, but his heart was still "after God" because he repented and renewed his allegiance (Ps 51).

Peter denied Jesus, but he was restored through loyalty (John 21).

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The Spirit's Role: Loyalty Empowered, Not Earned

Heiser ties this to the *new heart* promised in Ezekiel 36:26–27. The Holy Spirit indwells believers not to make them sinless overnight, but to **cultivate enduring allegiance.**

The Spirit's work means:

You are **securely in the family** because of God's covenant faithfulness.

You are being **transformed over time**, not instantly perfected.

The measure is **direction**, not perfection — are you oriented toward God?

Conclusion

**“Salvation is not about living a flawless life—it’s about living a loyal one.
God doesn’t expect perfection; He expects perseverance in allegiance.”**

The divine gift offered to every loyal heart is GRACE.