

Isaiah Chapter 38

Chapter 38:1-8

The events covered in this section (38:1 – 39:8), are actually out of order chronologically.

Chapters (36 and 37), serving as a conclusion to the Assyrian period of Isaiah's ministry, and (chapters 38 and 39), forming an introduction to the coming Babylonian captivity, which is pictured throughout (chapters 40-66).

Deeply broken by Isaiah's stern warning that "thou shalt die," Hezekiah "prayed" and "wept sore" and was given an extension of "fifteen years;"

God promised that he would deliver Jerusalem out of the hand of the "king of Assyria (see chapters 36 and 37).

In contrast to Ahaz, Hezekiah accepted the offer of a "sign" ("miracle"), requesting that the "sundial of Ahaz" be moved "ten degrees backward" by a supernatural miracle that reversed the falling shadow on the steps (or degree markers), of the sundial.

Isaiah 38:1 "In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came unto him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live."

"In those days ... sick":

Hezekiah's sickness occurred before the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem described (in chapters 36 and 37).

Isaiah placed the description of this illness here, along with (chapter 39), to introduce (chapters 40-66).

"Set thine house in order":

An instruction telling Hezekiah to make his final will known to his family.

The prediction that he shall die sounded final, but Hezekiah knew God was willing to hear his appeal (Exodus 32:7-14).

The very same statement is found (in 2 Kings chapter 20).

It appears that in the fourteenth year of the reign of Hezekiah, he becomes very sick, even unto death.

Sick unto death means a person could die with the sickness, and probably would have, if the LORD had not extended his life.

The prophet, Isaiah, brings the news to Hezekiah that he is about to die.

Prophets do not always bring good news.

They bring the message God has sent.

This type of message would be a shock to anyone.

Isaiah 38:2 "Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the LORD,"

“Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall”:

Not figuratively to the wall of his heart, as Jerom; but literally, either to the wall of his bedchamber where he lay sick, that his tears might not be seen, and his prayers interrupted, and that he might deliver them with more privacy, freedom, and fervency.

Or else to the wall of the temple, as the Targum says, towards which good men used to look when they prayed, 1 Kings 8:38.

Which was a type of Christ, to whom we should have respect in all our petitions, as being the only Mediator between God and man: and prayed unto the LORD; as follows:

Isaiah 38:3 "And said, Remember now, O LORD, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done [that which is] good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore."

“Perfect heart”:

Hezekiah based his implied request for an extension of his life on an undivided desire to please the LORD.

Hezekiah is like so many of us would be, if we knew we were about to die.

His plea includes a reminder to God that he has tried to live the way God would have him to live.

Notice, that Hezekiah says his heart has been right with God.

Hezekiah is about 39 years of age when this happens to him.

He feels he is too young to die.

It was not thought of as weakness for a man to cry at the time of this writing.

Even Jesus wept at the loss of his friend.

The crying just shows the sincerity of the prayer.

Isaiah 38:4-5 "Then came the word of the LORD to Isaiah, saying," "Go, and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years."

“Fifteen years”:

The LORD’s immediate response (2 Kings 20:4), granted the king’s request.

Having to reverse a prophecy so quickly did not alarm Isaiah as much as it did Jonah later on (See Jonah 4:2-3).

Isaiah resembled Nathan in this respect (2 Sam. 7:3-6).

It seems that the LORD spoke immediately to Isaiah to go and stop the fear of Hezekiah.

The LORD always hears our prayer.

We do not always hear directly back from God.

God spoke back to Hezekiah through Isaiah.

Notice, Hezekiah would have died had not God intervened.

It was a sickness unto death.

These fifteen years represented the grace of God toward Hezekiah.

This lengthening of Hezekiah's life would lengthen his reign as king of Judah, as well.

It would also, give him time to have a son to follow after him as king.

Isaiah 38:6 "And I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria: and I will defend this city."

The deliverance described in the previous chapter.

The blessing was not just of long life, but was also, a blessing of life in freedom.

God will stop the Assyrians, and not let them take the Holy city or take Hezekiah.

God will protect the city of Jerusalem, because it is His, and because it was David's city.

Verses 7-8

“Back ten degrees”:

Here is the first biblical mention of any means of marking time.

According to (2 Kings 20:8-10), Hezekiah requested this sign to confirm the LORD’s promise of healing.

Isaiah 38:7 "And this [shall be] a sign unto thee from the LORD, that the LORD will do this thing that he hath spoken;"

In the book of Kings, there is a more detailed account of this same story.

Very seldom does God give a sign, but he wanted there to be no doubt where the extra 15 years of life came from.

Hezekiah had been sick with boils.

The application of figs on the boils caused them to go away.

God uses medicine and doctors to heal many times.

Just because the doctor operates on you, and you are healed, does not mean that God was not the healer.

God is good for His Word.

Whatever He says He will do, He does.

Isaiah 38:8 "Behold, I will bring again the shadow of the degrees, which is gone down in the sun dial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward. So the sun returned ten degrees, by which degrees it was gone down."

There is a little more on this in 2 Kings 20:8-11.

"And Hezekiah said unto Isaiah, What [shall be] the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I shall go up into the house of the LORD the third day?"

"And Isaiah said, This sign shalt thou have of the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that he hath spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees?"

"And Hezekiah answered, It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees: nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees."

"And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the LORD: and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz."

You see, this would be an impossibility with man, but nothing is impossible for God.

Verses 38:9-22

"The writing of Hezekiah" is a song of deliverance.

His healing is described as having been brought about by a "lump" (cake) "of figs", which was to be applied to "the boil" (shechin), the same word used for one of the plagues of Egypt.

Isaiah 38:9 "The writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick, and was recovered of his sickness:"

"Writing of Hezekiah":

In response to his healing, Hezekiah wrote the record of his helplessness when facing death (verses 10-14), and told of God's response to his condition (verses 15-20).

This poetry is missing from the parallel account (in 2 Kings).

It seems that Hezekiah wrote all of this down for future reference.

The following verses are what he recorded.

Isaiah 38:10 "I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave: I am deprived of the residue of my years."

Hezekiah would have died in his early adulthood, if the LORD had not increased his days.

Hezekiah is explaining that he would have been cut down in his early years, before he could have a family.

Isaiah 38:11 "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 shall not see":

Hezekiah feared that death would terminate his fellowship with the LORD.

“LORD, even the LORD”:

The Hebrew repeats the name (“Yah, Yah).”

When a person dies, they are no longer involved with the happenings on the earth.

At death, we all vacate the house of flesh which we lived in on this earth.

We are no longer an inhabitant of earth.

We will spend eternity in heaven, or hell.

Isaiah 38:12 "Mine age is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent: I have cut off like a weaver my life: he will cut me off with pining sickness: from day [even] to night wilt thou make an end of me."

“Shepherd's tent ... a weaver”:

Two comparisons with transient articles illustrate how death removes in a moment what may have seemed so permanent.

I believe most people who are near death, are aware of it.

This is exactly what Hezekiah is saying here.

The sickness was boils, as we read earlier.

This type of boils was as serious as cancer would be today.

We are tabernacled in a body of flesh upon this earth.

Hezekiah is just saying that the tabernacle is to be removed like a tent.

Hezekiah is aware that the earthly house is a temporary dwelling place.

Isaiah 38:13 "I reckoned till morning, [that], as a lion, so will he break all my bones: from day [even] to night wilt thou make an end of me."

Hezekiah is explaining the pain.

It is as if a lion has broken his bones.

To die this way, would be a lingering death.

He is saying he was dying by degrees.

Isaiah 38:14 "Like a crane [or] a swallow, so did I chatter: I did mourn as a dove: mine eyes fail [with looking] upward: O LORD, I am oppressed; undertake for me."

In his helplessness, Hezekiah pleaded with God to deliver him from impending death.

This is saying, the pain was so great from the illness that Hezekiah cried out with pain.

He compares the cry to that of a crane, or a swallow.

The dove makes it appear how helpless he is in the onslaught of this illness.

The only answer to this type of oppression is to cry out to God.

That is just what Hezekiah is doing here.

Isaiah 38:15 "What shall I say? he hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done [it]: I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul."

The king had complete confidence in God.

Hezekiah is aware that God has answered his prayer, leaving no doubt at all who healed him.

He speaks of living the rest of his life peaceably knowing that God is his very present help.

He will be grateful for each day.

This has removed him from bitterness to thankfulness.

He is saying also, that his soul shall rest in God.

Isaiah 38:16 "O Lord, by these [things men] live, and in all these [things is] the life of my spirit: so wilt thou recover me, and make me to live."

The king's survival was God's accomplishment.

Hezekiah expands on his thankfulness to make all aware that their help, and in fact, even their lives are in God's hands.

Another way to express this is in the following Scripture.

Acts 17:28 "For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring."

It is the breath of God that gives each of us life.

Our life is in the breath God gave us.

Isaiah 38:17 "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul [delivered it] from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back."

“My sins behind thy back”:

Hezekiah felt his sickness was somehow related to his sinfulness.

To be rid of the latter was to be rid of the former also.

Bitterness was dangerous for Hezekiah to have and is dangerous for us, as well.

In this particular instance, it probably is speaking of the pain he had with his illness.

God healed his body and his spirit.

Now, Hezekiah has perfect peace.

He knows God has heard his prayer and answered it.

We also see a repentant man who knows God has forgiven his sins.

God took care of them for Hezekiah, as Jesus took care of all of our sins on the cross.

His sins are not before God anymore.

They are behind Him.

Isaiah 38:18 "For the grave cannot praise thee, death can [not] celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth."

“Cannot hope”:

Hezekiah’s understanding of the resurrection of believers was incomplete.

The same was true of others throughout much of the Old Testament.

But he was right in recognizing that death ended his opportunity for earthly praise and worship in the presence of men.

Those who have already left this earth cannot praise God.

This seems to be speaking of the lost who die “they that go down into the pit”.

Isaiah 38:19 "The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I [do] this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth."

"Father ... children":

Word about God's faithfulness passed from generation to generation (Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:7; Psalm 78:3-4).

If Hezekiah at this point had no heir, he had another reason for frustration over dying in the prime of life.

He is also saying, that those who follow after him will know of the goodness of God, because he will tell his offspring.

Isaiah 38:20 "The LORD [was ready] to save me: therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the LORD."

"Sing my songs ... in the house of the LORD":

Hezekiah was so overwhelmed with gratitude to God that he felt compelled to express it appropriately throughout the 15 years he had left on earth.

This reminds me of the Scripture in Psalms which says, "Let everything that has breath, praise the LORD".

There is great joy with Hezekiah now.

He will sing praises, accompanied by stringed instruments, to the LORD as long as he lives.

We have just as much as Hezekiah to praise God for.

He sent us a Savior.

We too, should praise the LORD all the days of our lives.

Verses 21-22

These furnish background details of the account (in verses 1-8).

Isaiah 38:21 "For Isaiah had said, Let them take a lump of figs, and lay [it] for a plaster upon the boil, and he shall recover."

"Lump of figs":

The medicine for healing the king's sickness (2 Kings 20:7).

This seems to be such a simple remedy for such a serious illness.

God could have healed him without the figs, had He wanted to.

The putting on of the figs was an act of faith in the recovery.

Hezekiah, in putting the figs on the boil, was saying I believe that God will heal me, when I do as He said.

Isaiah 38:22 "Hezekiah also had said, What [is] the sign that I shall go up to the house of the LORD?"

Hezekiah's request explained why the LORD gave him a sign that he would be healed (verse 7, 2 Kings 20:8).

Hezekiah went to the temple (verse 20), as Isaiah had instructed him to do (2 Kings 20:5, 8).

His faith in God would make him able to go to the house of the LORD.

Isaiah Chapter 38 Questions

1. Hezekiah was sick unto _____.
2. Who had told Hezekiah how sick he was?
3. What other parts of the Bible covers the same thing as Isaiah chapter 38 about Hezekiah's illness?
4. What is the message a prophet brings?
5. What did it show, when Hezekiah turned his head to the wall to pray?
6. What did Hezekiah ask God to remember?
7. Hezekiah's _____ has been right with God.
8. Why did Hezekiah weep?
9. God gave the answer to Hezekiah's prayer to _____.
10. How many years did God add to Hezekiah's life?
11. What did the number of the years signify?

12. What would the lengthening of Hezekiah's life allow him to do?
13. Who did God deliver, besides Hezekiah?
14. Why did God give him a sign?
15. What was the illness Hezekiah had?
16. How would God heal him?
17. What would happen to the sun dial as a sign of his healing?
18. Why did Hezekiah keep a record of what happened to him?
19. If Hezekiah had died of this illness, he could not have had a _____.
20. His age departed as what, in verse 12.
21. How does Hezekiah explain the depth of the pain with the boils?
22. His mourning was like a _____.
23. What kind of life will Hezekiah live after his healing?
24. In verse 18 we see, what cannot praise God.
25. Who does verse 19 say will praise God?
26. Let everything that _____ the Lord.
27. What does verse 20 say that Hezekiah will do all the days of his life?
28. How were the boils healed?