

## ISAIAH 38 | *Hezekiah Healed*

### *Point of Death*

1 In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, Thus says Yahweh: Set your house in order, for you shall die, you shall not recover. 2 Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall, prayed to Yahweh, 3 and said, Please, Yahweh, remember how I have walked (הלך) before you in truth (אמת) and with a whole heart (לב שלי) and have done what is good (טוב) in your sight. And Hezekiah wept bitterly.<sup>1</sup>

### *Fifteen Years Added*

4 Then the word of Yahweh came to Isaiah:

5 Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says Yahweh, the God of David (דוד) your father: I have heard your prayer. I have seen your tears. Behold, I will add fifteen years to your life. 6 I will deliver (נצל) you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria and will defend/enclose/fence/protect (גן) this city.

### *Sun Sign*

7 This shall be the sign (אית) to you from Yahweh, that Yahweh will do this thing that he has spoken. 8 Behold, I will make the shadow cast by the declining sun on the dial of Ahaz (אחז)<sup>2</sup> turn back ten steps.

So the sun turned back on the dial the ten steps by which it had declined.<sup>3</sup>

### *Bitterness of Soul*

9 A writing (מכתב) of Hezekiah king of Judah, after he had been sick and had recovered from his sickness:

10 I said, In the middle of my days I must depart. I am consigned to the gates of Sheol for the rest of my years. 11 I said, I shall not see Yahweh, Yahweh in the land of the living. I shall look on man no more among the inhabitants of the world. 12 My dwelling is plucked up and removed from me like a shepherd's tent. Like a weaver I have rolled up my life. He cuts me off from the loom. From day to night you bring me to an end. 13 I calmed myself until morning. Like a lion he breaks all my bones. From day to night you bring me to an end. 14 Like a swallow or a crane I chirp. I moan like a dove. My eyes are weary with looking upward. Lord (אדוני), I am oppressed (עשוק).

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<sup>1</sup> Hezekiah is facing undeserved suffering. He wants to be the king who meets the Assyrian threat and who guides Judah in one of her finest hours.

<sup>2</sup> Hezekiah's father.

<sup>3</sup> Yahweh rules space and time.

Be my pledge of safety! 15 What shall I say? For he has spoken to me, and he himself has done it. I walk slowly all my years because of the bitterness (מַר) of my soul.

*In Love You Have Delivered My Life*

16 Lord (אֲדֹנָי), by these things men live, and in all these is the life (חַיִּי) of my spirit (רוּחִי). Oh restore me to health (חַלְמִי) and make me live (חַיִּי)! 17 Behold, it was for my welfare (שְׁלוֹמִי) that I had great bitterness (מַרְרִי לִי מְּוֹדָה). But in love (חֶשֶׁק) you have delivered my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back. 18 For Sheol (שְׁאוֹל) does not thank you. Death (מָוֶת) does not praise you. Those who go down to the pit do not hope for your faithfulness/truth (אֱמֻנָתְךָ). 19 The living, the living, he thanks you, as I do this day. The father makes known to the children your faithfulness/truth (אֱמֻנָתְךָ).

*Music Every Day*

20 Yahweh will save (יִשַׁע) me, and we will play my music on stringed instruments all the days of our lives, at the house of Yahweh.

*Cake of Figs*

21 Now Isaiah had said, Let them take a cake of figs and apply it to the boil, that he may recover. 22 Hezekiah also had said, What is the sign (אֵימֹת) that I shall go up to the house of Yahweh?

## Commentary

### 1. Overview.

- a. Is 38-39 serve as an introduction to Is 40–66, which focus not on Assyria, but on the Babylonian captivity.<sup>4</sup>
- b. A big question these chapters answer is: “Is Hezekiah the promised child of 7:14 and 9:6-7? Is he in fact the Messiah? The answer is a resounding no. We must expect another. God extends Hezekiah’s life by fifteen years, but he still only a man, not the Messiah.<sup>5</sup>

### 2. Point of Death (Is 38:1-3).

- a. **Is 38:1-3** 1 In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, Thus says Yahweh: Set your house in order, for you shall die, you shall not recover. 2 Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall, prayed to Yahweh, 3 and said, Please, Yahweh, remember how I have walked (הלך) before you in trustworthiness/constancy/faithfulness/truth (אֱמֻנָה) and with a whole/undivided heart (לֵב שָׁלֵם) and have done what is good (טוֹב) in your sight. And Hezekiah wept bitterly.
- b. Sometime around 703-701 bc, Hezekiah becomes deathly sick (v. 1). He suffers from some sort of boil (v. 21). He is about 39 years old (he was born around 740 bc) and has been reigning for about 15 years (since 716 bc).
- c. Isaiah comes to tell Hezekiah that he will die and that he needs to set his house in order (v. 1).
  - (1) When we approach physical death, we, too, are to set our house in order. We are to speak with our loved ones, ensure they are provided for, and give last instructions as to our property. This is the responsible and Christian thing to do.
- d. Hezekiah turns to the wall and prays for healing (v. 2). He asks God to remember his faithfulness, wholeheartedness, and goodness (v. 3).
  - (1) **2 Ki 18:5-7** 5 [Hezekiah] trusted in Yahweh, the God of Israel, so that there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those who were before him. 6 For he held fast to Yahweh. He did not depart from following him, but kept the commandments that Yahweh commanded Moses. 7 And Yahweh was with him. Wherever he went out, he prospered.
  - (2) “It is God’s purpose that his people be able to be true (faithful) to him and that their hearts might be one toward him.”<sup>6</sup>
  - (3) If we are terminally ill, it is certainly not evil to ask God for a longer life. God wants us to ask, though he may say no.

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<sup>4</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 672.

<sup>5</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 672-73.

<sup>6</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 676.

- e. Hezekiah is bitter inside because his lifespan is being cut short (v. 3). He wants to be the king who faces Sennacherib. He is also sonless. His son Manasseh won't be born until three years later (see 2 Ki 21:1).
  - (1) "No good Hebrew could view being cut off childless in midlife as anything but a most severe judgment from God."<sup>7</sup>

### 3. Fifteen Years Added (Is 38:4-6).

- a. **Is 38:4-6** 4 Then the word of Yahweh came to Isaiah: 5 Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says Yahweh, the God of David (דָּוִד) your father: I have heard your prayer. I have seen your tears. Behold, I will add fifteen years to your life. 6 I will deliver (נִצַּלְתָּ) you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria and will defend/enclose/fence/protect (גָּרַגַּ) this city.
- b. God responds to Hezekiah's prayer. He sends back Isaiah immediately with a message (v. 4).
  - (1) **2 Ki 20:4** 4 And before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of Yahweh came to him....
  - (2) "[P]rayer can change the course of events, and...failure to pray is not necessarily a sign of submission to God's intractable will. Rather, it may be a sign of apathy and unwillingness to wrestle with God."<sup>8</sup>
- c. Yahweh describes himself as the "God of David your father" (v. 5). This shows the Davidic covenant continues to be very much on God's heart.
  - (1) **Is 55:3** 3 Incline your ear, and come to me. Hear, that your soul may live. And I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.
- d. God makes two promises. First, he will extend Hezekiah's life 15 years to 687 bc (v. 5). Second, Hezekiah will be king when God delivers Jerusalem from the king of Assyria (v. 6). Hezekiah's name will forever be associated with God's great deliverance of Zion. God fulfilled both promises. No king of Assyria ever captured Jerusalem.

### 4. Sun Sign (Is 38:7-8).

- a. **Is 38:7-8** 7 This shall be the sign (תִּשְׂמָחָה) to you from Yahweh, that Yahweh will do this thing that he has spoken. 8 Behold, I will make the shadow cast by the declining sun on the dial of Ahaz (תִּשְׂמָחָה)<sup>9</sup> turn back ten steps. So the sun turned back on the dial the ten steps by which it had declined.<sup>10</sup>
- b. Yahweh gives Hezekiah a sign of his promise (v. 7). The shadow of the dial of his father, Ahaz, will turn back ten steps (v. 8). This happens (v. 9).
- c. The sign was in response to Hezekiah's request for a sign, as we learn later (v. 21) in 2 Kings.

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<sup>7</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 676.

<sup>8</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 675.

<sup>9</sup> Hezekiah's father.

<sup>10</sup> Yahweh rules space and time.

- (1) **2 Ki 20:8-10** 8 And Hezekiah said to Isaiah, What shall be the sign that Yahweh will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of Yahweh on the third day? 9 And Isaiah said, This shall be the sign to you from Yahweh, that Yahweh will do the thing that he has promised. Shall the shadow go forward ten steps, or go back ten steps? 10 And Hezekiah answered, It is an easy thing for the shadow to lengthen ten steps. Rather let the shadow go back ten steps.
- d. How this miracle of the reversal of the sun's shadow occurred is not known. Perhaps the earth's rotation was reversed or perhaps the sun's rays were somehow refracted.<sup>11</sup> In any case, the celestial sign seems to have been noticed in faraway Babylon.
- (1) **2 Ch 32:31** 31 And so in the matter of the envoys of the princes of Babylon, who had been sent to him *to inquire about the sign that had been done in the land*, God left him to himself, in order to test him and to know all that was in his heart.
- e. Hezekiah's sign encounter with God is much more positive than was Ahaz's sign encounter in Is 7:10-12. Through it, Isaiah again confirms he is God's prophet. God's prophets always give objective signs their words are from God and not themselves.

### 5. Hezekiah's Bitterness (Is 38:9-15).

- a. **Is 38:9-15** 9 A writing (מִכְתָּב) of Hezekiah king of Judah, after he had been sick and had recovered from his sickness: 10 I said, In the middle of my days I must depart. I am consigned to the gates of Sheol for the rest of my years. 11 I said, I shall not see Yahweh, Yahweh in the land of the living. I shall look on man no more among the inhabitants of the world. 12 My dwelling is plucked up and removed from me like a shepherd's tent. Like a weaver I have rolled up my life. He cuts me off from the loom. From day to night you bring me to an end. 13 I calmed myself until morning. Like a lion he breaks all my bones. From day to night you bring me to an end. 14 Like a swallow or a crane I chirp. I moan like a dove. My eyes are weary with looking upward. Lord (אֲדֹנָי), I am oppressed (צָרָה). Be my pledge of safety! 15 What shall I say? For he has spoken to me, and he himself has done it. I walk slowly all my years because of the bitterness (מַר) of my soul.
- b. When Hezekiah recovered, he wrote this poem to record his own experience of God's deliverance (v. 9).
- c. In the poem, Hezekiah is upset that his life is ending when he is still in the prime of life (v. 10). It isn't his time to go to Sheol, the place of the dead (v. 10). He tells himself he will no longer see God or man in the land of the living (v. 11). God is bringing his life to an end, like packing up a tent or cutting a cloth from off a loom (v. 12). He is able to calm himself somewhat until morning (v. 13), but the bitterness returns. He views God as a lion breaking his bones (v. 13). God is bringing his life to an end (v. 13). All Hezekiah can do is chirp and moan (v. 14). His eyes grow weary with staring at the ceiling from his sickbed (v. 14). He cries out to God, "I am oppressed. Save me!" (v. 14). God has told Hezekiah he has caused the sickness, and Hezekiah is bitter about it (v. 15). He has been a good king, like David. Why is God cutting short his life through this sickness?

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<sup>11</sup> John A. Martin, "[Isaiah](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1089.

- (1) His statement that in death he will not see Yahweh does not mean he had no hope of heaven. It probably means that he would no longer have the benefit of enjoying God's blessings in this life.<sup>12</sup>

## 6. In Love You Have Delivered My Life (Is 38:16-19).

- a. **Is 38:16-19** 16 Lord (אֲדֹנָי), by these things men live, and in all these is the life (חַיִּי) of my spirit (רוּחִי). Oh restore me to health (חַלְמִי) and make me live (חַיִּיה)! 17 Behold, it was for my welfare (שְׁלוֹמִי) that I had great bitterness (מַרְרִי לִי). But in love (חֶשֶׁק) you have delivered my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back. 18 For Sheol (שְׁאוֹל) does not thank you. Death (מָוֶת) does not praise you. Those who go down to the pit do not hope for your faithfulness/truth (אֱמֻנָתְךָ). 19 The living, the living, he thanks you, as I do this day. The father makes known to the children your faithfulness/truth (אֱמֻנָתְךָ).
- b. In the second half of these poem, Hezekiah recognises the lives of men totally depend on God and his will (v. 16). So his life is in God's hands (v. 16). He then asks directly for God to restore his health and make him live (v. 16). He recognises the great bitterness he has experienced is for his ultimate welfare (v. 17). God is delivering Hezekiah from death because of his love for Hezekiah and David (v. 17). God has also forgiven and forgotten all of Hezekiah's sins (v. 17). This salvation gives Hezekiah the opportunity to thank and praise God for his truth, something Sheol cannot do to the same degree (vv. 18-19). Restored to life, Hezekiah promises to make known to his children the faithfulness of God (v. 19).
- (1) **Ro 8:28** 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.
- (2) "As Calvin remarked, and as Jesus demonstrated (Luke 5:17-26), forgiveness of sins and recovery from illness are two sides of God's saving power. Hezekiah apparently felt that had he died this untimely death it would have been in punishment for sin, perhaps the sin of pride. Now the fact that he is recovering is evidence that God has turned away from Hezekiah's sins and turned to Hezekiah. Whatever may have been Hezekiah's spiritual condition, the truth may be affirmed that a sense of unforgiven sin is a killer which often bars the way to physical and emotional healing. The corollary of this truth is that the confidence that our sins are buried in the sea of God's grace is frequently the key to healing in these areas (Ps. 103:3, 4)."<sup>13</sup>

## 7. Music Every Day (Is 38:20).

- a. **Is 38:20** 20 Yahweh will save (יִשְׁע) me, and we will play my music on stringed instruments all the days of our lives, at the house of Yahweh.
- b. In the last line of the poem, Hezekiah expresses his confidence God will save him, using the three radicals of Jesus' name (v. 20). He and his entourage will play music and sing every day in the temple as a memorial of God's great healing deliverance (v.

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<sup>12</sup> John A. Martin, "Isaiah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1089.

<sup>13</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 687.

20). This will become a daily routine in Hezekiah's life. Hezekiah's gratitude to God will continue for the rest of his life.

- (1) "[H]owever inscrutable his ways and fearsome his judgments, beneath all that beats a Father's heart which does hear the cries of his children and can be depended upon to deliver."<sup>14</sup>
- (2) How did Manasseh respond to his father's daily practice?

## 8. Cake of Figs (Is 38:21-22).

- a. **Is 38:21-22** 21 Now Isaiah had said, Let them take a cake of figs and apply it to the boil, that he may recover. 22 Hezekiah also had said, What is the sign (אִיָּמָה) that I shall go up to the house of Yahweh?
- b. Hezekiah's healing was both supernatural and natural. Isaiah instructed him to employ a natural remedy, a cake of figs (v. 21). A poultice of dried figs was a common treatment for boils and ulcers in those days. It was used by God medicinally to promote the healing. This is an example of healing occurring because of a combination of prayer, medicine, and God's work.<sup>15</sup>
- c. It is difficult to determine whether Hezekiah's asking for a sign (v. 22) was wise or unwise. Whether Hezekiah should have asked for a sign, God did actually give him a very impressive sign (v. 7).
  - (1) Ordinarily, we should not ask for signs. Trusting in the promises of God's word should be enough for us.

## 9. Application.

- a. When facing a terminal illness, pray in faith for God's healing.
- b. Don't refuse natural remedies in addition to prayer.
- c. Reflect on the brevity of human life and realise the length of our life is in God's hands.
- d. When God does grant healing, praise him every day for it.

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<sup>14</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 689.

<sup>15</sup> John A. Martin, "[Isaiah](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1090.