

ISAIAH 39 | *Hezekiah Bears All*

Hezekiah Bears All

1 At that time¹ Merodach-baladan (מֶרֶדַח בַּלְאֲדָן) the son of Baladan, king of Babylon (בָּבֶל), sent envoys with letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that he had been sick and had recovered. 2 And Hezekiah welcomed them with joy (שִׂמְחָה). And he showed them his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his whole armoury, all that was found in his storehouses. There was nothing in his house (בֵּיתוֹ) or in all his realm (מְמִשְׁלָתוֹ) that Hezekiah did not show them. 3 Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah and said to him, What did these men say? And from where did they come to you? Hezekiah said, They have come to me from a far country, from Babylon (בָּבֶל).² 4 He said, What have they seen in your house? Hezekiah answered, They have seen all that is in my house. There is nothing in my storehouses that I did not show them.

Everything Shall Be Carried to Babylon

5 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah,

Hear the word of Yahweh of hosts: 6 Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon (בָּבֶל). Nothing shall be left, says Yahweh. 7 And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be high officials/eunuchs (סָרִיסִים)³ in the palace of the king of Babylon.

8 Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, The word of Yahweh that you have spoken is good (טוֹב), for he thought, There will be peace (שְׁלוֹמִים) and stability (אַמְנוּתָה) in my days.

¹ According to most commentators, chronologically, this chapter falls after Isaiah 37 and before Isaiah 38.

² Abraham was called by God to be the father of a new nations, Israel, who would counter the tower of Babel instinct in man. Israel and Babylon were to be on two different trajectories. Jerusalem was to have no dealings with Babel.

³ Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were eunuchs in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar (Da 1:6-7).

Commentary

1. Overview.

- a. Chronologically, this chapter falls after Is 38 but before Is 36-37. In other words, Hezekiah becomes sick, he is restored to life, he shows the Babylonians everything, and then he meets the Sennacherib challenge in 701 bc. The events are out of order chronologically for theological reasons.
 - (1) “[T]he Babylonian rebel Merodach-baladan seems to have been out of the picture by 703 [bc]. Beyond this, it is inconceivable that the Babylonian envoys would have come to congratulate Hezekiah solely on his recovery if he had recently experienced a great deliverance from Assyria. Furthermore, as Young and others point out, most of the temple treasures were stripped to pay the initial, abortive tribute to Sennacherib, leaving nothing to show the Babylonians if they came after that time. Finally, the dates of the Babylonian revolutionary Merodach-baladan... seem to confirm that the sickness did not occur after Sennacherib’s attack, but before it.”⁴
 - (2) Merodach-Baladan ruled from 721 to 710 and nine months in 703-702 bc. Though chapters 38–39 precede chapters 36-37 chronologically they follow them here because Hezekiah’s folly led to the prophecy of the Babylonian Captivity, and because chapters 38-39, as stated earlier, prepare the way for chapters 40-66.⁵
- b. This chapter answers with a resounding no the question whether Hezekiah is the Messiah.⁶
 - (1) [C]hs. 36-39 make chs. 40-66 a necessity. Without Isaiah 40-66, Isaiah would be an incomplete book. “The message of Isaiah does not reach its conclusion at the end of ch. 39. Too many questions remain unanswered.”⁷

2. Hezekiah Bears All (Is 39:1-4).

- a. **Is 39:1-4** 1 At that time Merodach-baladan (מְרֹדַךְ בַּלְאָדָן) the son of Baladan, king of Babylon (בָּבֶל), sent envoys with letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that he had been sick and had recovered. 2 And Hezekiah welcomed them with joy (שִׂמְחָה). And he showed them his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his whole armoury, all that was found in his storehouses. There was nothing in his house (בַּיִת) or in all his realm (מְמִשְׁלָה) that Hezekiah did not show them. 3 Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah and said to him, What did these men say? And from where did they come to you? Hezekiah said, They have come to me from a far country, from Babylon (בָּבֶל). 4 He said, What have they seen in your house? Hezekiah

⁴ 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), 674-675.

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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), 630.

⁷ 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), 697.

- answered, They have seen all that is in my house. There is nothing in my storehouses that I did not show them.
- b. Merodach-baladan (Marduk-apla-iddina II) (v. 1) was a perpetual thorn in the side of the Assyrian empire.
- (1) “[H]e held the throne of Babylon in defiance of Sargon from 721 until 710, when the latter finally ousted him. Then again in Sennacherib’s reign, from about 705 to 703, he captured the Babylonian throne a second time. But even after his defeat in 703, he seems to have continued to foment revolt from bases in Elam across the Persian Gulf.”⁸
- c. Sometime around 703-701 bc, Merodach-baladan hears of Hezekiah’s illness and recovery and sends envoys with a gift to Hezekiah (v. 1). His real motivation is to invite Hezekiah to ally with him against Assyria. Babylon will revolt in the east; Judah and her neighbours will revolt in the west.
- (1) “Twice [Merodach-baladan] had tried to break away from the Assyrian Empire, and once had succeeded in taking the city of Babylon. After his second reign (of nine months in 703-702 b.c.) he was deposed by Sennacherib and went to Elam. While there (and while still known as **the king of Babylon**) he actively tried to form an alliance with other nations to throw off the Assyrian yoke.”⁹
- (2) “Merodach-Baladan’s visit preceded Sennacherib’s attack on Jerusalem in 701 (since some of the wealth there had not yet been given to Sennacherib as tribute, 2 Kings 18:16). Therefore it seems as if all three events occurred in 701, in this order: Hezekiah’s illness, Merodach-Baladan’s visit, Sennacherib’s attack.”¹⁰
- d. From 2 Ch, there were two other reasons behind this visit: (1) God was testing Hezekiah’s heart; and (2) the Babylonians wanted to learn more about the solar sign that had occurred.
- (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 welcomes the Babylonians with joy and shows them his treasure house, armoury, and storehouses. He shows them everything (v. 2).
- (1) “[T]his kind of reliance upon, and delight in, human power and glory is exactly what the first half of the book is warning against.”¹¹
- (2) “Instead of trusting God, there is every indication that Hezekiah is trusting the nations, as represented by Babylon. Beyond that, he is depending upon the

⁸ 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), 693-694.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ 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), 694-695.

accumulated wealth of Judah. It seems as if all the lessons of chs. 7-35, so brilliantly exemplified in chs. 36 and 37, have been forgotten.”¹²

- f. Isaiah then comes and asks Hezekiah: (1) what he and the envoys have they talked about; and (2) where they are from. Hezekiah only answers the second question (v. 3). Isaiah then asks (3) what the Babylonians have seen, and Hezekiah admits they have seen everything (v. 4). Hezekiah gets credit for honesty.
- (1) “Hezekiah knows enough of Isaiah’s (and God’s) position on foreign alliances to know that he can win no points by relating the conversation.”¹³

3. Everything Shall Be Carried to Babylon (Is 39:5-8).

- a. **Is 39:5-8** 5 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, Hear the word of Yahweh of hosts: 6 Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon (בְּבָבֶל). Nothing shall be left, says Yahweh. 7 And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be high officials/eunuchs (סְרִיסִים) in the palace of the king of Babylon. 8 Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, The word of Yahweh that you have spoken is good (טוֹב), for he thought, There will be peace (שְׁלוֹמִים) and stability (אֲמֻנָה) in my days.
- b. Isaiah then delivers a stern message from Yahweh (v. 5). One day the Babylonians will carry away absolutely everything belonging to the house of David (v. 6). Additionally, Hezekiah’s own sons will be taken away and become high officials under the Babylonian king (v. 7).
- (1) **Da 1:1-6** 1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 And Yahweh gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god. 3 Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, 4 youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king’s palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. 5 The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. 6 Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah.
- (2) “[T]hey will not be merely captives but king’s eunuchs, men who have been emasculated so that they no longer have thoughts of their own line and authority but are content to do their master’s bidding.”¹⁴

¹² 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), 692.

¹³ 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), 695.

¹⁴ 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), 697.

- (3) “Isaiah’s message to Hezekiah is the same as it was to Ahaz, whose trust was in Assyria. ‘That which we trust in place of God will one day turn and destroy us.’”¹⁵
- c. Hezekiah, focused on himself and not his children and grandchildren, views Isaiah’s prophecy as “good” because there will be “peace” (שָׁלוֹם) and “stability” (אֲמָת) in his lifetime (v. 8).
- (1) This is an extremely selfish and short-sighted way to view his life. He seems to totally forget about the Davidic covenant. He seems to care only about his own “personal peace and affluence.”
- (2) “Personal peace means just to be let alone, not to be troubled by the troubles of other people, whether across the world or across the city to live one’s life with minimal possibilities of being personally disturbed. Personal peace means wanting to have my personal life pattern undisturbed in my lifetime, regardless of what the result will be in the lifetimes of my children and grandchildren. Affluence means an overwhelming and ever-increasing prosperity a life made up of things, things, and more things a success judged by an ever-higher level of material abundance.”¹⁶

4. Application.

- a. Faith is to be a way of life and not just a one-time affair.
- (1) “Chapter 39 is wholly negative. Hezekiah, like Jerusalem, is all too easily diverted from his trust when the pressure is removed. All too easily God’s people are seduced by this world’s values and put their trust in human glory—wealth, arms, luxuries—when all along we live and prosper by God’s good pleasure alone. Hezekiah demonstrates that trust must be a way of life and not merely a one-time affair.”¹⁷
- b. We are to care about future generations, not just our own.
- c. What we trust in place of God will often be what destroys us.

¹⁵ 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), 696.

¹⁶ Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?*, 205.

¹⁷ 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), 673.