

Is. 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.

Sometime before the Lord had delivered Jerusalem from the Assyrians (cf verse 6), Hezekiah became sick with a terminal illness. JFB indicates that verse 6 is just an affirmation that Jerusalem will never be threatened by the Assyrians again; this view actually makes more sense to me. God sends Isaiah to tell Hezekiah to make preparations for his succession because he is going to die. I guess this would be a little bit more complicated since Hezekiah had no heir.

We know from the information provided in the following two verses that Hezekiah was 39 at this time ($25 + 29 - 15 = 39$).

2 Kings 18:1–2 “Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign. Twenty and five years old was he when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem.”

2 Kings 20:6 “And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David’s sake.”

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

Is. 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.

When Hezekiah approaches God this time, he is making a personal plea for mercy. He bases that plea on the fact that he has always tried to make choices that brought honor to God. Note is then made that Hezekiah wept with many tears. One commentator suggested that his sorrow was increased because he had no heir to the throne. It would seem that this was a man under great stress—facing approaching death and the threat of enemy armies.

I liked this observation by Calvin: “...though he sees on every hand nothing but the tokens of God’s anger, yet he does not cease to fly to him, and to exercise faith, which all believers ought earnestly and diligently to do amidst the heaviest afflictions.”

Is. 38:4 Then came the word of the LORD to Isaiah, saying,

Is. 38:5 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.

Is. 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.

Is. 38:7 And this *shall be* a sign unto thee from the LORD, that the LORD will do this thing that he hath spoken;

Is. 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.

God responds to Hezekiah through His prophet Isaiah. 2Kings adds a little more detail to this section. The Lord tells Hezekiah through Isaiah to present himself at the temple on the third day from His response. He affirms that He has heard Hezekiah's prayer and is going to add 15 years to his life. He also affirms His promise to deliver Jerusalem from the king of Assyria. In the meantime, they are to apply a poultice of figs to the boil (inflammation, ulcer) that has caused Hezekiah's illness.

The account in 2Kings tells us that Hezekiah asked for a sign from God to declare the truth of Isaiah's message. God then gives him the choice of having the sun go either forward or backwards ten degrees. Hezekiah chose backwards, since his reasoning told him that would be the more miraculous. Only God the Creator could intervene in the laws of science that He established. Sure enough—the sun went backwards ten degrees.

It's very interesting to me that God chose to answer this prayer. He knew that He would allow Hezekiah to produce an heir to the throne in light of His promise to David and that Hezekiah would fall to the temptation of pride. Hezekiah's heir was the evil king Manasseh. His wickedness and pride would eventually contribute to Judah being conquered by Babylon. God didn't let His foreknowledge impact His response to Hezekiah's prayer.

Hezekiah had been a good king, one that "did *that which was* right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father did" (2Kings 18:3). God even described him as one who "trusted in the LORD God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor *any* that were before him" (2Kings 18:5). God accomplished His purposes while working through the desires of His child even though rewarding that child would result in bad things (from our perspective). I believe if Hezekiah could be given that choice again, knowing what he does now, he would have prayed differently. I believe he would have prayed "nevertheless, not my will but thine." I believe God would have healed him and provided him heirs anyway since that was part of His plan in bringing forth the Messiah from the line of David. Who knows how the rest of history would have been impacted. The one thing of which I am certain is that God's plan would stand and not be thwarted.

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

Is. 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.

Is. 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.

Is. 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.

When he had recovered from his illness, Hezekiah decided to make a record of his thoughts. His first thoughts were sadness that he was being deprived of a normal lifespan; he would not get to enjoy the later years of his life. It's interesting that he was bemoaning the fact that he would no longer see the Lord in the land of the living. What did he mean by that? I believe he must have been speaking of seeing God's hand at work on behalf of His people. He was also saddened at the thought of losing fellowship with his friends, "the inhabitants of the world." Verse 12 indicates that Hezekiah's illness (an inflammation or ulcer of some sort) was recognized as one that got progressively worse, resulting in death. It's interesting that he compares his life to a tent, a temporary dwelling place. Is this a declaration of his belief in his life after death?

Is. 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.

Is. 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.

Is. 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.

Is. 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.

Is. 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.

These verses seem to express the extremes of Hezekiah's emotions. He was in great pain and suffering during the time of his illness when he expected to die. He knew that his only hope was in the Lord. Then he is overwhelmed at God's goodness in answering his prayer. At this point Hezekiah is greatly humbled at God's answer to his prayer. He expects to live these next 15 years in remembrance of his great sorrow that God turned to great joy. He recognizes in God's answer to his prayer a declaration of His love for Hezekiah. He also recognizes that God's answer to his prayer is an act of mercy—a choice to not consider Hezekiah's sins in determining His response. This shows that Hezekiah knew he wasn't "perfect" (cf verse 3) before the Lord, but that he was striving to choose the things that would honor God.

Is. 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.

Is. 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.

Is. 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.

These verses declare Hezekiah's intent to continue to honor God with his next 15 years. He intends to praise God and celebrate in the knowledge of God's love for him. It would seem that Hezekiah considered death as putting one in a position of being unable to praise God, so maybe he didn't understand the concept of life

after death. Or maybe he thought one was just in limbo until the time of resurrection expected by the Old Testament saints.

Job 19:25-27 For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.

Whatever the case, Hezekiah was filled with songs of praise, which he intended to offer as his sacrifice of praise in the house of the Lord, the temple. Jeremiah is the prophet through whom God declared the praises of his people an acceptable sacrifice.

*Jeremiah 33:10-11 Thus saith the LORD; Again there shall be heard in this place, which ye say shall be desolate without man and without beast, even in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, that are desolate, without man, and without inhabitant, and without beast, The voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, Praise the LORD of hosts: for the LORD is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: and of them that shall bring **the sacrifice of praise** into the house of the LORD.*

Is. 38:21 For Isaiah had said, Let them take a lump of figs, and lay *it* for a plaister upon the boil, and he shall recover.

Is. 38:22 Hezekiah also had said, What *is* the sign that I shall go up to the house of the LORD?

These verses seem to be out of sequence. They were referenced in sequence above using the account from 2Kings.