

Book of Isaiah



Chapter 38

Theme: Prayer of Hezekiah

Michael Fronczak

**564 Schaeffer Dr.
Coldwater, Michigan 49036**

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Chapter 38

THEME: Prayer of Hezekiah when told he is to die; promise of healing -- miracle of the sundial; Hezekiah's poem of praise

This chapter deals with King Hezekiah's illness, prayer, and healing. It is well to keep in mind that while Hezekiah was beset by the danger of the Assyrian host, he was plagued by a "boil." His deliverance from death must have been prior to the destruction of the Assyrian host. It was while the siege was going on, and the answer to prayer must have encouraged his heart relative to Isaiah's prediction of the coming deliverance of Jerusalem. Hezekiah reigned twenty-nine years. He reigned fifteen years after this event, so his sickness was in the fourteenth year of his reign, and we are told that Sennacherib came up against Jerusalem in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reign (see Isa. 36:1). All of this happened in the same year -- the sickness of Hezekiah and the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians.¹

The events of chapters 38 and 39 happened before those of chapters 36 and 37.²

These chapters concern an interesting event in Hezekiah's life. Though God miraculously healed the king, his pride led to national calamity. In chapters 36-37, Hezekiah was a man of faith, but here he was a man of pride. This account is also recorded in 2 Kings 20.³

¹In 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.

Hezekiah's sickness: boil (v. 21) [See Ex 9-11 (6th plague of boils), Lev 18:18-23 (this term used of a leprous ulcer), Deut 28:21, 35 ("botch of Egypt"), Job 2:7 (Job's predicament).]⁴

[In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death] This implies that Hezekiah's sickness was during the time of trouble with the Assyrians, when they were seeking his surrender (Isa. 36:1 -- Isa. 37:38). This seems clear also from the fact that he reigned 29 years and this invasion of Judah was in his 14th year (Isa. 36:1), leaving the added 15 years of his life and reign to take place after this (2Ki. 18:2).

[sick unto death] The cause of his sickness was a large boil or ulcer (Isa. 38:21). The reason for any sickness at all was his pride (2Chr. 32:24-26).

¹ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

² Life Application Study Bible.

³ The Bible Knowledge Commentary:

⁴ Chuck Missler, Notes on Isaiah, khouse.org.

[And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz come unto him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live] The 40th prophecy in Isaiah (Isa. 38:1, fulfilled, though postponed fifteen years, Isa. 38:1,4-8). Next, Isa. 38:5.⁵

From verse 6 it is clear that Hezekiah's illness preceded Sennacherib's surrounding of Jerusalem, recorded in chapters 36-37. Merodach-Baladan, mentioned in 39:1, ruled from 721 to 710 and nine months in 703-702 b.c. (he ruled before Sennacherib's invasion of Judah in 701). 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. Hezekiah's illness included a boil (38:21). Isaiah told him he would die.⁶

It is interesting the way this chapter opens. We have seen that "in that day" is a technical expression that speaks of the Tribulation and millennial days. This verse does not open by saying, "In that day," but by saying, "In those days." What "days" is Isaiah talking about? He is talking about those days in which he and Hezekiah lived. Hezekiah was sick unto death. He was having trouble with a "boil" that was just about to kill him. On top of that he was having trouble with the Assyrians. There are those who believe that Hezekiah's "boil" was either cancer or leprosy, or something similar. Whatever it was, it was a terminal disease, and his time to die had come.

The sentence of death was delivered to Hezekiah by Isaiah. It is true that this sentence of death rests upon each one of us, although we do not know the day nor the hour. But we do know this: "...it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). This is a divine date. If each one of us knew the exact time, our life-style would change.

Some years ago I received a letter from a fine young minister who had been told by his doctor that he had cancer and that his days were limited. He sent out a letter to some of his friends, and I was privileged to be included in that list. Here is a brief quotation from his letter so that you might know the thinking of a man under the shadow of death: "One thing I have discovered in the last few days. When a Christian is suddenly confronted with a sentence of death, he surely begins to give a proper evaluation of material things. My fishing gear and books and orchard are not nearly so valuable as they were a week ago." I conducted this young preacher's funeral. And many years later I had the experience of having cancer myself. My doctor told me he thought I had only about three months to live. I can bear witness to the accuracy of the young preacher's statement. It was amazing how certain things suddenly became very unimportant. One of those things was my home. I thought I would not be living in it but a few more weeks, and it certainly became unimportant to me; but where I was going became very important. Well, God had other plans for me, for which I am indeed grateful. I thank and praise Him for each new day He gives to me.

When Hezekiah was confronted with death, what did he do?⁷

⁵ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

⁶ The Bible Knowledge Commentary:

⁷ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

After the threat of invasion by Assyria was over, you would expect things to return to normal. But like life often does to us, Hezekiah's trial was immediately followed by another one: he became deathly sick.

The prophet Isaiah came to the king and told him that he was in fact going to die. This wasn't just for information purposes. It was so that Hezekiah would "set his house in order."

When we think of setting our houses in order, our first thoughts are primarily financial: You make sure your will is up to date, you give key people your life insurance information, transferral of retirement benefits, etc.

Then, many people begin to think beyond the financial and get into the relational. "Have I told the people I love how I feel about them? Have I communicated everything so that there won't be any regrets?"

Unfortunately, what is often not on people's lists is the spiritual. Spiritually speaking, is your house in order? Have you left the proper information with your loved ones? Have you said everything that needs to be said, with no regrets? Are you prepared to meet your Maker?

Hezekiah wasn't ready. That's why Isaiah was sent by the Lord to tell him to set his house in order.⁸

1-5 When Isaiah went to Hezekiah, who was extremely ill, and told him of his impending death, Hezekiah immediately turned to God. God responded to his prayer, allowing Hezekiah to live another 15 years. If you have a desperate need in your life, bring it to the Lord. In response to fervent prayer, God may change the course of your life, too.⁹

1-6 According to 2 Chronicles 32:24-26, Hezekiah had a problem with pride even after this double miracle of healing and deliverance. Eventually he and his subjects humbled themselves, so God's judgment was put off for several more generations.¹⁰

The formal introduction of the prophet signals a new section of the book. Isaiah visited the king with a message from the Lord—to set his domestic affairs in order, because he would not recover from his illness but die (cf. 2 Sam. 17:23; 1 Kings 2:1-9). Sometimes what God announced through His prophets seemed inevitable, but when His people prayed it became negotiable (cf. Gen. 32:26; Exod. 32:7-14; James 4:2).¹¹

²Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the LORD,

We have seen Hezekiah in prayer before when he spread Sennacherib's letter before the Lord.

Then -- after he had the sentence of death pronounced upon him.

2-3. Hezekiah's prayer does not explicitly state a request to live longer, but it is implied. Many have criticized Hezekiah for this request. However, self-preservation characterizes nearly

⁸ <http://rondaniel.com/library/23-Isaiah/Isaiah3801.php>

⁹ Life Application Study Bible.

¹⁰ Life Application Study Bible.

¹¹ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

everyone. Hezekiah asked the Lord to remember the good things he had done as king (cf. 2 Kings 18:5-8).¹²

Perhaps Hezekiah turned his face to the wall to concentrate or to make his prayer private. Perhaps he felt completely devastated and withdrew into himself (cf. 1 Kings 21:4). He requested God's mercy in the form of lengthened life, though he did not voice the request in so many words. He based his appeal on his godly walk before God and his wholehearted devotion to God. Hezekiah was a good king who reformed his nation spiritually (cf. 2 Chron. 29—31). He appealed for longer life on the basis of his godliness, because God promised to bless the godly who lived under the Old Covenant with long life (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:33; 7:12-15; 30:16). His bitter tears showed the depth of his sorrow. He would apparently die without an heir to the throne, in the full strength of his manhood, and with his nation in an unsettled state.¹³

2-3 Hezekiah Wept Bitterly

Hezekiah was saying, "Please let me live longer, after all, look how good I've been!" Does a good life always warrant a long life? What about when a righteous person dies "early" in life? Should we be confused by that? Does anybody actually die early? I don't believe so. The Word of God tells us that the Lord has already set each person's lifespan:

Job 14:5 "...his days are determined, the number of his months is with You..."

Some people don't have as many days as others, and we don't know why the Lord chooses that number. But He does. And in Hezekiah's life, like in each of ours, God knew what He was doing.

In this case, I think we're given a clue. The book of 2Chronicles tells us that after the victory over Assyria,

2Chr. 32:23-24 And many were bringing gifts to the LORD at Jerusalem and choice presents to Hezekiah king of Judah, so that he was exalted in the sight of all nations thereafter. In those days Hezekiah became mortally ill...

It would seem that Hezekiah's good life was going to be short for the very reason that it was good. If he continued to get all of this recognition and attention, it is very likely that he would have fallen into pride.

But instead of being content with God's decision, Hezekiah tried to convince God that he deserved a longer life than this.¹⁴

³And 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.

In this prayer he no doubt told the truth about his godliness, for he was one of only a few kings of Israel who were somewhat godly.¹⁵

¹² The Bible Knowledge Commentary:

¹³ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

¹⁴ <http://rondaniel.com/library/23-Isaiah/Isaiah3801.php>

¹⁵ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

Three claims of Hezekiah:

1. I have walked before You in truth.
2. I have walked before You with a perfect heart.
3. I have done that which is good in Your sight.

[wept sore] Hebrew: bakah (HSN-<H1058>), wept a great weeping, or lamented grievously (Isa. 38:3; 2Ki. 20:3).¹⁶

“Remember now how I have lived before you truly and wholeheartedly.” Hizkiyahu based his request for healing on his faithfulness to God. It was this kind of response that God was seeking from all of Y’hudah.¹⁷

This is a time when a man can weep. I wept when I was told I was going to die. I am sure the young preacher wept when he heard the news from his doctor. You are bound to weep at a time like that. But Hezekiah also prayed on the basis of his life. This man had a good reputation before God, and under the Mosaic Law this was the accurate thing to do. 2Kings 18:5 says concerning Hezekiah: "He 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." Hezekiah was an outstanding man. He was not boasting when he made that claim.¹⁸

⁴Then came the word of the LORD to Isaiah, saying,

[Then came the word of the LORD to Isaiah] Then -- when Hezekiah had prayed, wept intensely, humbled himself, and repented of his pride (2Chr. 32:24-26), God sent Isaiah to him again to assure him that his prayer had been heard: he would have fifteen years added to his life, and would be delivered from the king of Assyria (Isa. 38:4-6).¹⁹

4-5 God did hear and answer his prayer and extended his life by fifteen years. He did it, not for Hezekiah's sake, but for David's sake.

That is not the basis upon which our prayers are heard today. Our prayers are heard for the sake of David's greater Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. In John 16:23-24 the Lord says, "And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full" (italics mine). You and I can go to our Heavenly Father with our requests in the name of Christ. To pray in the name of Christ means that you are in Christ, and you are praying for His will to be done. It means that it is to please Him. Sometimes He will heal and sometimes He won't. He is the One to decide.²⁰

¹⁶ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

¹⁷ Complete Jewish Study Bible Study Notes

¹⁸ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

¹⁹ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

²⁰ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

4-6. In response to the king's prayer God said through Isaiah that He would grant the king 15 more years. Since Hezekiah died in 686 b.c. this illness would have been in 701 (see the chart "Kings of Judah and Israel and the Preexilic Prophets," near 1 Kings 12:25-33). In addition, God would not allow the Assyrians to take Jerusalem. These facts would have been a great comfort to Hezekiah.²¹

God sent His answer to Hezekiah's prayer back to him through Isaiah (cf. 2 Kings 20:4). The Lord identified Himself as the God of David, his forefather. Perhaps the reference to David helped Hezekiah remember God's promises to David about the perpetuity of his dynasty (2 Sam. 7). This reminded the king that God would remain faithful and care for His people.

God had noted Hezekiah's prayer and his tears, and they had touched Him. The Lord graciously promised him 15 more years of life. Long life was a blessing that God had promised the godly under the Old Covenant, so His grace was in harmony with His promises.²²

4-6 I Will Add Fifteen Years

The writer of Kings gives us a little more detail than Isaiah does:

2Kings 20:4-6 Before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "Return and say to Hezekiah the leader of My people, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of your father David, "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD. I will add fifteen years to your life, and I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake and for My servant David's sake.'""

Isaiah hadn't even left Hezekiah's house before God told him to turn around and tell the king that his life was going to be extended for 15 years.

This enters into a dynamic of man's prayer and God's will that I don't think we will ever fully understand. You see, Hezekiah's life was spared because he prayed. And yet, this was not God's ideal for Hezekiah. As we're going to see, he would have been much better off if he had died when he was supposed to. And yet, it's clear that this extension was also not a curse on Hezekiah for whining. In fact, the life extension was a benefit.

2Chr. 32:25 But Hezekiah gave no return for the benefit he received, because his heart was proud...

So the extension was a blessing, but because of Hezekiah's pride, it turned out to be a curse, which of course God knew would happen all along. Confused yet? If not, you're not thinking hard enough about it!

Have you wrestled with the issues of man's prayer and God's plans? It's something that we all should do. Not that we'll come up with any definitive answers, but it challenges our faith to grow and expand with every Bible verse we read about it.

So what can we conclude from all of this? Your guess is probably as good as mine. But what it ministers to me today is that we should whine less and seek contentment more. We should reach the point of maturity that the apostle Paul did, when he said...

Phil. 4:11-13 ...I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

²¹ The Bible Knowledge Commentary

²² <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

Hezekiah wasn't content with God's original plan, and pressed for something different. He ended up getting what he asked for, but also suffered the consequences of being outside of God's will.

One of my greatest fears is that I will press the Lord in prayer for something He doesn't want for me. May the cry of our hearts be,

Luke 22:42 "...yet not My will, but Yours be done."²³

⁵Go, 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.

Ps 106:15 "And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul."

Hezekiah got his request, but it may not have been a good idea because they were not good years. Some scholars point out that this particular sickness may have been the sign of divine displeasure (Job 15:32, 22:5, 16; Ps 55:23, Prov 10:27).

Manasseh was not yet born (2 Chr 33:1, 2 Kgs 21:2) and he was the most wicked king (he repents at 50!). Manasseh's son Amon was also bad. Josiah however, brought great revival.²⁴

Four predictions -- fulfilled:

1. I will add to fifteen years your life.
2. I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of Assyria (Isa. 38:6).
3. I will defend this city.
4. As a sign this is a true prophecy -- I will reverse the shadow on the sundial of Ahaz (Isa. 38:7-8).²⁵

God called Himself "the God of thy father David":

1. Because of David's resemblance to him in doing all that was right (in the sight of the Lord; 2Ki. 18:3-7).
2. Because David was a special servant of God (2Sam. 7:5-29).
3. Because of the Davidic covenant (2Sam. 7).²⁶

[add unto thy days fifteen years] This is the only time God ever told a man how long he would live. Just why He did is not known, but it was fulfilled to the letter. Hezekiah died after a reign of 29 years (Isa. 18:2). This promise of 15 more years was in the 14th year of his reign (Isa. 36:1).²⁷

Add Fifteen Years: If Hezekiah reigned for a total of 29 years as it says in 2 Kings 18:2 then this illness and miracle happened in the 14th year of his reign at which time all the events that led up to the siege of Jerusalem began. All of his greatest public works, including the digging of the Gihon-Siloam tunnel were still to be achieved. And the defeat of Sennacherib's army by divine intervention had not happened yet. Thus the events of chapters 38 and 39, -- Hezekiah's illness

²³ <http://rondaniel.com/library/23-Isaiah/Isaiah3801.php>

²⁴ Chuck Missler, Notes on Isaiah, khouse.org.

²⁵ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

²⁶ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

²⁷ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

and the miracle of the sundial, and the visit of Merodach Baladin from Babylon -- all preceded the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib²⁸.

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

God ties in His deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrian with the deliverance of Hezekiah from death. God's answer to one request will encourage the believer's heart that He will answer the other requests. To be honest with you, I have been greatly strengthened in my own faith since God heard and answered the prayers of a host of radio listeners concerning my health.²⁹

Deliver out of the hand of the King of Assyria: In the introduction to this section at the beginning of chapter 36 we give a fuller discussion and further evidence that shows that these events took place before the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib. This verse and what follows confirms this view. It confirms again the source of the confidence that Hezekiah had which he was also able to convey to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. He knew on the basis of this miracle that the siege recorded in chapters 36 and 37 would not be successful.³⁰

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

Two signs were given to Hezekiah:

1. He would go up to the house of the Lord in three days (2Ki. 20:5).
2. The shadow on the sun dial would be brought backward ten degrees (Isa. 38:8; 2Ki. 20:5-11). This is the only timepiece mentioned in Scripture, but there must have been some means of telling the hours, even in the night, for watches of three and four hours are mentioned. The shadow moving backward was an immediate miracle. See note, 2Ki. 20:10.³¹

7-8 God gave him a sign, which was an assurance that He would answer his prayer.

F. C. Jennings (Studies in Isaiah, p. 438) translates the verse like this: "Behold, I will cause the shadow of the steps to return, which is gone down on the steps of Ahaz with the sun, backward ten steps. And the sun returned ten steps by the steps which it had gone down." You see, the translation of "degrees" can also be "steps." Dr. Jennings comments: "We can now transport ourselves in spirit to Hezekiah's palace, and into his chamber. There lies the king, still prone on his couch, but with his face no longer turned to the wall, but joy and hope brightening his eye as he looks out of the window to the gardens, in the midst of which, and in full view, stands an obelisk, or column, with a series of steps leading up to it, and at least ten of these are lying in the column's shadow; for the sun has gone so far down as to throw the shadow over that number of

²⁸ <http://www.moellerhaus.com/36-39.htm>

²⁹ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

³⁰ <http://www.moellerhaus.com/36-39.htm>

³¹ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

steps. But look again, the once darkened steps are now in clearest sunlight -- 'tis the sign for which the king had asked!"³²

7-8. God confirmed His promise to Hezekiah by a sign (cf. comments on v. 22). Apparently a special stairway had been built as a time device, a kind of sundial. As the sun went down in the west, a shadow would move upward on the staircase so that people could ascertain the time of the day. Interestingly Ahaz had rejected a sign from the Lord (7:10-12) but now on a staircase named for him his son Hezekiah was given a sign. 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.³³

7-8 The Sun's Shadow Went Back

From reading the parallel passage in 2Kings 20, we find out that Hezekiah's terrible illness wasn't cured right away. It was going to be a few days before he felt good enough to get up. But as reassurance, God gave him a sign that the sun would move backwards in the sky.

Although this account is completely and historically true, there is an urban legend that continues to circulate through Christian circles.

As the story goes, NASA scientists were running computer simulations of orbital mechanics to check the position of the sun, moon, and planets 100 years from now and 1,000 years from now in order to plot spacecraft trajectories and future satellite missions. As they ran their computers up and down the centuries, the computer kept crashing because they calculated that we were a day off.

Then, one of the men remembered a Sunday School lesson about an event in Joshua 10. Joshua was leading the Israelites in a fight against five kings. Joshua prayed,

Josh. 10:12-13 ..."O sun, stand still at Gibeon, And O moon in the valley of Ah-yaw-LONE." So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, Until the nation avenged themselves of their enemies. Is it not written in the book of YawSHAWR? And the sun stopped in the middle of the sky, and did not hasten to go {down} for about a whole day.

The legend continues that when the NASA scientists plugged in the numbers, they got very close to reconciling the positions of all the planets. But they were only able to account for 23 hours and 20 minutes. What had happened to the other 40 minutes?

Fortunately, this same man remembered this story. They ran the calculations of the steps in degrees and discovered that the missing 40 minutes fit exactly! The Bible had saved the space program!

Of course, this has been proven time and again by secular and Christian sources to be pure fiction. Even without asking NASA (and they have been asked LOTS of times), the holes in the story are plentiful and obvious. If it gets sent to you, delete it. Certainly don't forward it.³⁴

The Lord also graciously gave Hezekiah a sign that He would indeed do what He had promised, in response to Hezekiah's request for a sign (v. 22; 2 Kings 20:8). The stairway of Ahaz was evidently an exterior stairway that led to his upper room on the roof of the palace, where Ahaz had erected altars (2 Kings 23:12). This stairway was probably not built as a sundial, but it served that purpose as the sun cast its shadow on more or fewer steps depending on the

³² Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

³³ The Bible Knowledge Commentary

³⁴ <http://rondaniel.com/library/23-Isaiah/Isaiah3801.php>

time of day. That stairway may have been constructed as a sundial, or a different stairway constructed for that purpose could be in view. One writer believed it was an obelisk that rested on a stepped base and served as a sundial.⁴⁰⁷ Evidently Hezekiah could see it from his sickbed. The passing away of daylight on the stairway symbolized the passing away of Hezekiah's life, and the return of sunlight represented the restoration of life.

Was this miracle a local or a global phenomenon? What the Lord promised was the movement of the shadow, not the sun that cast the shadow. This opens the possibility for a local miracle in which the shadow moved backward while the earth continued to rotate as usual (cf. 2 Chron. 32:31).

The reference to King Ahaz recalls the earlier incident involving the sign that God gave that king. God had told him to request a sign as high as heaven (7:11). Now God gave Ahaz's son, Hezekiah, a sign from heaven. Ahaz had refused to ask for a sign because he did not want assurance that God would destroy his allies. Hezekiah requested a sign because he wanted assurance that God would spare his life. Ahaz did not want to trust God, but Hezekiah did.³⁵

⁸Behold, 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.

2 Chr 32:31 (parallel account notes that they requested the sun to go backwards, not forward.)
All calendars changed in 701 B.C.

Jonathan Swift: Gulliver's Travels described the two moons of Mars in precise detail, 150 years before they were discovered! Might have been drawing upon legends which were really eye-witness accounts! (Implying near passby of Mars!)

Were the 15 years a good idea?? These years bring nothing but grief. Two years later Manasseh was born; when Hezekiah dies he takes over (at age 12). He put up the idols in the high places. According to Talmudic sources, Manasseh martyrs Isaiah, apparently sawing him in half with a wooden saw (also alluded to in Heb 11)!³⁶

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

The verses following are a fine thesis on death by one who was very near to it. Many believe that Hezekiah composed Psalm 116 at this time.

Now the question arises: Was Hezekiah right in asking God to extend his life?³⁷

9-15. After he was healed Hezekiah wrote a song to express his thanks to God. His illness came, he said, in the prime of his life. Death was referred to figuratively as having gates through which a person entered (cf. Job 38:17; Pss. 9:13; 107:18). His statement that in death he would not... see the Lord 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. He would be without friends (Isa. 38:11)

³⁵ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

³⁶ Chuck Missler, Notes on Isaiah, khouse.org.

³⁷ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

as his house (his body) was dismantled. By death he would be cut... off like a cloth being cut from a weaver's loom. He had hoped he would get well (v. 13) but he got worse (vv. 13-14). His illness was as if God were a lion breaking all his bones, a figure of speech depicting his deep inner anguish. In some way his cries of pain were like the sound of a bird and his mourning like the doleful sound of a dove (cf. 59:11; Nahum 2:7). Hezekiah realized that this experience should humble him because God had brought on this illness.³⁸

Hezekiah's letter. A thanksgiving psalm such as this pertaining to a situation that threatened the life of the king would typically be inscribed on a stone stele. An example of this is found in the inscription of Sin-Iddinam, who was king over the town of Larsa in the nineteenth century B.C. In a letter to the god Nin-Isina (known as a healer) the king presents his piety, benevolence and effectiveness as reasons why the god should extend healing mercy, which is granted.

9-22 The bulk of this section is a psalm of lamentation and thanksgiving that Hezekiah composed after his recovery (vv. 10-20). It is the only extant narrative in the Old Testament written by a king of Judah after the time of Solomon.⁴⁰⁸ Compare King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon's similar testimony of praise, after God delivered him from insanity (Dan. 4:34-35). This psalm is also chiasmic in structure. It begins with reference to the gates of Sheol and sorrow at the prospect of shortened days (v. 10), and it ends with reference to the house of the Lord and joy at the prospect of lengthened days (v. 20). The king began by referring to the land of the living being exchanged for the departed (v. 11), and he ended with reference to the land of the departed exchanged for the land of the living (vv. 18-19). In the middle, he contrasted God's hostility (vv. 12-14) with His restoration (vv. 15-17).⁴⁰⁹ Hezekiah described his condition first (vv. 9-14), and then he praised God for His mercy (vv. 15-20).³⁹

9-20 After Hezekiah's Recovery

King Hezekiah wrote these verses down after he recovered from his illness. It is a bit difficult that Isaiah placed them before verses 21 and 22, since chronologically it comes after. But the writing he wrote afterwards talks about what he experienced during those minutes after he got the news, so I probably would have placed them between verses four and five. But since nobody asked me, I'm sure they're right where they belong!

In this writing, you can see all of Hezekiah's mistaken ideas and bad theology, even while having faith in God.⁴⁰

¹⁰I 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.

Verses 10-20 are a psalm Hezekiah wrote when he was healed.

[grave] Hebrew: She'owl (HSN-<H7585>), the unseen world; the place of departed spirits, not the grave.

³⁸ The Bible Knowledge Commentary

³⁹ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

⁴⁰ <http://rondaniel.com/library/23-Isaiah/Isaiah3801.php>

[I am deprived of the residue of my years] Like most men, he thought he was entitled to more years than those he'd already lived. He had looked forward to a long life and a prosperous reign, and now his hopes were suddenly dashed to the ground.⁴¹

¹¹I 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.

¹²Mine 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.

Hezekiah viewed his life as fragile as a shepherd's temporary tent, which shepherds frequently moved from place to place. His life was like a weaver's finished piece of cloth that the weaver cuts off decisively and rolls up to take away. Both images are of objects that suddenly disappear from their expected places. Before the day of his life was out, the Lord would end it.

The thought is that in the morning one did not expect anything untoward to occur, and by evening, when darkness had come, the event had already taken place (cf. Job 4:20).⁴²

¹³I 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.

I am delivered up to death like prey to a lion; my bones will be broken and I will come to an end.⁴³

¹⁴Like 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.

Crane - crane or swallow, also refers to leaper. (Cf. Jer 8:7, Ex 14:9, Ezek 38, 39.)⁴⁴

I chattered like a crane or a swallow; I mourned like a dove; my eyes failed me when I realized that I must die.

[crane] The crane is a well-known bird with long legs which inhabits marshlands. Its cry is rather hoarse sounding, melancholy, and expressive of grief (Jer. 8:7).

[swallow] The swallow is known for its twittering -- a bird of migration (Ps. 84:3; Prov. 26:2; Jer. 8:7).

⁴¹ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

⁴² <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

⁴³ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

⁴⁴ Chuck Missler, Notes on Isaiah, khouse.org.

[dove] The dove is often mentioned in Scripture as a clean bird. Innocent in disposition, it offers no resistance to enemies. They are strongly attached to their mates; when one dies or is absent the other laments with lonely cries.⁴⁵

¹⁵What 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.

This question expresses surprise at being healed and having such unexpected deliverance. God has spoken (of adding fifteen years to my life) and He has also done it. I will go softly all the years to come, in the bitterness of my soul; that is, I will always remember the distress of my sickness, and my healing; and I will be sober and grateful.⁴⁶

The king was amazed at the change of events (cf. v. 5). Nevertheless the bitter disappointment that had come into his heart because of the prophet's announcement of impending death (v. 1) was something he would never forget.⁴⁷

¹⁶O 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.

By these promises of God and their fulfillment do men live. I am alive by virtue of these things.⁴⁸

16-18 Hezekiah realized that his prayer brought deliverance and forgiveness. His words "the dead cannot praise you" may reveal that he was unaware of the blessedness of the future life for those who trust in God (57:1, 2), or he may have meant that dead bodies cannot praise God. In either case, Hezekiah knew that God had spared his life, so in his poem Hezekiah praises God. Hezekiah recognized the good that came from his bitter experience. The next time you have difficult struggles, pray for God's help to gain something beneficial from them.⁴⁹

16-20. Hezekiah was grateful that God restored him to health. After the experience he could see that it was really for his benefit that it happened (v. 17; cf. Rom. 8:28). He sensed for one thing that God's love was with him and that God did not punish him in accord with what his sins deserved. When he said that those who are dead cannot praise the Lord (Isa. 38:18) he was not denying life after death. He was simply noting that in death one's activities on earth are stopped and that one's service on earth for God terminates (Ps. 30:9). However, Hezekiah affirmed that while he was still alive he would proclaim the Lord's faithfulness (Isa. 38:19). Because the Lord healed him, the king said he would sing to the Lord in the temple.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

⁴⁶ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

⁴⁷ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

⁴⁸ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

⁴⁹ Life Application Study Bible.

⁵⁰ The Bible Knowledge Commentary

He prayed that others would learn from his experiences, as he himself would, and that the Lord would indeed restore his health and his life. Another interpretation of the last line of this verse sees the king rejoicing that the Lord would restore him.⁵¹

¹⁷Behold, 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.*

Instead of peace I had bitterness until You loved me and delivered me from death. You have ceased to punish me for my sins; they are now forgiven and put behind Your back.⁵²

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

[grave] Hebrew: She'owl (HSN-<H7585>), the unseen world; the place of departed spirits, not the grave.

The grave cannot praise you. The concept of an afterlife was not well developed in the ancient Israelite mind. The land of the living was the time and place to worship and praise God. The dead went to sheol, a watery place of darkness for the dead⁵³

¹⁹The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I *do* this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth.

The sense of Isa. 38:18-20 is that men who die cannot praise God on earth or hope for further truth; but the living are still on probation: they can praise God, know the truth, and be saved as he was blessed that day.⁵⁴

Hezekiah spoke of the significance of passing the joy of the Lord from generation to generation. The heritage of our faith has come to us because of faithful men and women who have carried God's message to us across the centuries. Do you share with your children or other young people the excitement of your relationship with God?⁵⁵

⁵¹ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

⁵² Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

⁵³ NIV First Century Bible Study Notes

⁵⁴ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

⁵⁵ Life Application Study Bible.

20The 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.

At this time there was a great welling up of praise in the heart of Hezekiah. His song of praise to God was evidently set to music and sung.

However, after this experience Hezekiah became rather proud and arrogant. In the Book of Chronicles, which is God's viewpoint of history, we are told: "But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up: therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem" (2Chron. 32:25). Here is evidence to the fact that maybe he should not have asked for an extension of life because it led to pride in his life -- he was raised up!

When I became ill, I remembered the story of Hezekiah. I went to the Lord and said, "If you will let me live, I will promise to do your will, and I will continue to get out your Word." That is the reason I have overextended myself in conferences and meetings. I didn't want to let the Lord down. But He has made it pretty clear to me that I should not kill myself by overdoing, since He has extended my life. Now I am trying to be reasonable in what I do.

After experiencing a miracle like Hezekiah did, there is a danger of withdrawing from the Lord. You would think that it would draw one closer to Him, but instead there is a grave danger of getting away from Him.

Was he right in asking God to extend his life? Should he not have died when the time came? There is another consideration which leads me to believe that he should have died when he was so ill. Manasseh, his son, was twelve years old when he began to reign, which means that he was born after Hezekiah's sickness. Manasseh was the worst king who reigned in either kingdom. I consider Manasseh worse than Ahab and Jezebel put together. I think that it was during his reign that the Shekinah glory departed. If it didn't depart during his reign, I can't think of any reason it would depart afterward. Manasseh was very much like Antichrist, the Man of Sin who is yet to come.

In the next chapter we will see that Hezekiah played the fool after his experience in healing. Now how did God perform the healing of Hezekiah? Did he have Isaiah pray over him? Or did Isaiah lay his hand on him so hard that he fell backward? No. Notice what Isaiah did --⁵⁶

Hezekiah concluded his poem of praise by affirming his belief that God would be faithful to him and would keep him alive for as long as He had promised (v. 5). This would be the basis for his continuing public praise of God in His presence for the rest of his life.⁵⁷

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

Boil: See Ex 9-11 (6th plague of boils); Lev 18:18-23 (this term used of a leprous ulcer); Deut 28:21, 35 ("botch of Egypt"); Job 2:7 (Job's predicament).

Old Testament had a limited view of death (Hezekiah was 39). Jesus brought life and immortality to light (2 Tim 1:10), freed us from bondage (Heb 2:14, 15), death became absent

⁵⁶ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

⁵⁷ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

from the body, present with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8), for better (Phil 1:23), “never see death” (Jn 8:51).⁵⁸

This poultice was not for healing, for God had already healed him and added fifteen years to his life (Isa. 38:5). It was merely for cleansing and bringing corruption to the surface.⁵⁹

In other words, he did the two things that James recommends: "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord" (James 5:14). This anointing is not religious nor ceremonial. The oil is for healing; it is medicinal. And the elders are to pray for the one who is sick. What God said through Isaiah and through James is the same. When you get sick, pray and call for the doctor. God expects us to be sensible.⁶⁰

21-22. In the parallel account in 2 Kings these two verses in Isaiah precede the giving of the sign (see 2 Kings 20:7-9). A poultice of dried figs, a common treatment for boils and ulcers in those days, applied to the boil (possibly an inflamed ulceration), 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. Hezekiah's question, What will be the sign...? did not evidence lack of faith. In fact it was the opposite. Believing that he would be healed, he asked God for confirmation of His word.⁶¹

The poem having ended, Isaiah now added a postscript giving more detail about Hezekiah's recovery. Verses 21 and 22 are more smoothly integrated into the story of Hezekiah's recovery in 2 Kings 20 than they are here. This fact has led scholars to speculate about which account was first, which was second, or did both draw from a common source? There is no way to answer this question for sure. Hezekiah had evidently suffered from a boil, but the boil was probably only a symptom of a more serious disease (cf. v. 1). When Isaiah, acting as a physician, applied a fig poultice to the boil, the king recovered (cf. James 5:14).⁶²

Prepare . . . apply. The verbs are plural and are probably addressed to the court physicians. Poultice of figs. Figs were also used for medicinal purposes in ancient Ugarit. He will recover. Contrast v. 1. God answered Hezekiah's prayer for healing (see v. 5).⁶³

21-22 Before Hezekiah's Healing

In these verses, we see that Isaiah gave instructions to heal Hezekiah. We're also made aware of the unpleasant fact that the sickness, whatever it might have been, had manifested in a boil.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Chuck Missler, Notes on Isaiah, khouse.org.

⁵⁹ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible:

⁶⁰ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

⁶¹ The Bible Knowledge Commentary

⁶² <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

⁶³ NIV First Century Bible Study Notes

⁶⁴ <http://rondaniel.com/library/23-Isaiah/Isaiah3801.php>

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

Hezekiah had requested the sign that God had sent (vv. 7-8). He wanted assurance that he would recover so he could worship the Lord again in public. He did not just anticipate recovering, but he looked forward to worshipping after he recovered.

This chapter can stand alone in the text as a positive lesson on prayer, faith, and worship. But, as the next chapter reveals, chapter 38 also records the Lord's preparation of Hezekiah for another very significant incident in his life. Ahaz had refused to trust God and had refused to ask for a sign. Hezekiah trusted God but then failed to continue to trust Him in spite of a sign. Jerusalem, like Hezekiah, had received a reprieve from God, but it would only be a temporary one for the same reason.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>