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Hezekiah Became Ill and Was at the Point of Death

38: 1-8

Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death **DIG: Why is Hezekiah so distressed by the message from Isaiah? What is the track record of wholehearted devotion on which he appeals to the LORD to spare his life (see Second Kings 18:1-3)? Hezekiah asked Isaiah for a sign that his healing would occur (also see Second Kings 20:8-11). How does this contrast with Ahaz' response to Isaiah in 7:11-14, when Ahaz was told to ask for a sign but refused to do so? Which man, Ahaz or Hezekiah, demonstrates more faith? How so? What does God's response tell you about the LORD and His mysterious ways?**

REFLECT: Wicked people often live easy lives, or long lives, whereas those serving God often experience great hardships. How do you deal with the seeming unfairness (see Psalms 37 and 73)? What might be God's perspective be on the matter? How do you think you will face death? How would the prospect of death change your view of material things? What hope does the Gospel give you that was unknown to Hezekiah?

This chapter deals with **King Hezekiah's** illness, prayer and healing. **His** deliverance from death was before the Assyrian defeat by **the Angel of the LORD (37: 36-38)**. **Hezekiah** reigned twenty-nine years. **He** reigned fifteen years after this event, so **his** illness 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 (36:1)**. So the illness of **Hezekiah** and defeat of the Assyrian army all happened in the same year.

This section is about Hezekiah's serious illness, his prayer to God, the divine promise of a longer life and his thanksgiving. A parallel version with slight variations and the omission of Hezekiah's psalm of thanksgiving is found in Second Kings 20:1-11. At the time **Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death, Isaiah son of Amoz** was sent **to him** with a message

(38:1a). The **LORD** said that **he** was to put **his house in order, because he** was **going to die. He would not recover (38:1b)**. This meant drawing up **his** last will and testament, and also appointing a successor. This became especially necessary because at that time **Hezekiah** had no sons. Another member of the house of **David** needed to be chosen because **Isaiah** told **the king** that the illness was terminal.

It was evident that **Hezekiah** knew something of **ADONAI's** character that Moses also knew (see the commentary on **Exodus, to see link click [Gs](#) - Now Leave Me Alone So That My Anger May Burn Against Your People**): **God** is always waiting to hear from us. **He** is relentless in **His** desire to bless us. **He** is **the LORD** of second chances (see the commentary on **Jonah**). It does not mean that we can pray to **God** to tell **Him** what to do, or that failure to pray is not necessarily a sign of surrender to **His** unyielding will. Rather, it may be a sign of apathy, or an unwillingness to wrestle with **God** (see the commentary on **Genesis [Hw](#) - Jacob Wrestles With God**). This is an antimony; two things that are seemingly opposite, but both are true. For example, the trinity is an antinomy, three distinct, separate persons, yet one. It's hard to get your mind around it. We probably will not truly understand it until we get to heaven. On the one hand, we cannot play **God** and dictate the events of our lives to **Him**; yet on the other hand, we cannot expect **ADONAI** to help us if we do not pray (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ [Ih](#) - The Parable of the Persistent Widow**). We must believe that prayer changes things.



When **Isaiah** left, **Hezekiah** turned his face to the wall in prayer, and **turning away from the people gathered around his bed, he** withdrew to himself (**2 Kings 20:2**). At that time, **he** summarizes **his** spiritual state saying: **Remember, O LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes. And Hezekiah wept bitterly** for **he** wanted to live (**38:2-3**).

That **he** was faithful to **ADONAI** was not only **Hezekiah's** evaluation, it was also **the LORD's** evaluation. **God the Holy Spirit** tells us that **he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father David had done. He removed**

the high places, smashed the sacred stones, and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it (It was called Nehushtan). Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Isra'el. **There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the Lord and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the Lord had given Moses (Second Kings 18:3-6).** David was a man after **God's** own heart, and yet in the evaluation of **Hezekiah**, **God** says that **his** spirituality exceeded that of **David himself** or any other king in **Judah's** history.

It is worth noting that **Hezekiah** did not withdraw completely because **he** did not withdraw from **God**. But **he** also didn't lecture **the LORD** on the injustice of it all, nor demand that **ADONAI** heal **him** because of **his** position or reputation. Rather, **he** simply poured out the feelings of a wounded heart to a heavenly **Father**. No father's heart can be unaffected by such a cry. Nor was **the LORD's**.

Almost immediately **God** answered **Hezekiah's** prayer. **Before Isaiah had left the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him (Second Kings 20:4-5 and Isaiah 38:4).** The **middle court** was the central portion of **the City** where the royal palace stood. The Hebrew word *keri*, or *the middle court*, was not **the middle court of the Temple** but **the middle court of the** royal palace.¹⁴³ Therefore, **before Isaiah had left** the palace on **his** way home after talking to **Hezekiah**, **ADONAI** gave **him** the message *to return* to **Hezekiah** and say: **This is what the LORD, the God of your relative David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; therefore, I will add fifteen years to your life (38:5).**

Hezekiah had behaved like a true **son**, or descendant, of **David** in the way he reacted to the news of his impending death.¹⁴⁴ In addition, it was clear that **the Davidic** Covenant said that **David** would never be without a man to sit on **his** throne (**Second Samuel 7:5-16**). **Hezekiah**, the king, had no children at this time. **God** had **seen Hezekiah's tears, heard his prayer**, and would **add fifteen years to his life**. We know from the account in **Second Kings** that **Hezekiah** was 54 years old when **he** died, so that would make **him** 39 here. In **Second Kings 20:5** we learn that the healing would occur within three days of **Isaiah's** prophecy.

Besides healing **him**, **Isaiah** also prophesied that **he** would also be delivered from Sennacherib and Jerusalem will be delivered from the Assyrians. **And I will deliver you and this City from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this**

City (38:6). This may seem confusing if we do not remember that **Chapters 38** and **39** come chronologically before **Chapters 36** and **37**.

Unfortunately, when **God** said: **I will defend this City** and as a result when **the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-thousand men in the Assyrian camp (37:36)**, it would eventually lead to a false theology on the part of the Jews called **the inviolability of the Temple** (see my commentary on [Jeremiah Cc - False Religion is Worthless](#)). Because **God did defend His city**, the Jews came to look upon **the Temple** as their “good luck charm.” And since **God did** deliver Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib and the Assyrian army, **the Jews came to assume that they had guaranteed security because of the existence of the Temple**.

Even worse, they believed that because of the supposed security net of **the Temple**, they could do anything they wanted there and there would be no consequences. This thinking ended up in idol worship within **the Temple** itself (**Ezeki’el 8**)! When **ADONAI** said: **I will defend this City (38:6b)**, the Israelites believed **He** would never violate or destroy **His Temple** because **He** made **His** dwelling place among **His** people. Like a child’s abuse of a parent’s love, **they** falsely concluded that there would never be any consequences. But **Jeremiah** knew better and so **he** warned the Levites: **Do not trust in deceptive words** and say: **This is the Temple of the LORD, the Temple of the LORD, the Temple of the LORD (Jeremiah 7:4)**. In the process of worshiping **their** idols they would actually walk around **the Temple** chanting: **This is the Temple of the LORD**, over and over again as if to remind **God** of **His** promise.

The Levites in the Temple of the LORD disregarded **Jeremiah’s** warning. **They** would find out soon enough that while **God** did love **His Temple**, **He** hated **their** sin even more. The **people** of Jerusalem, in **Jeremiah** and **Ezekiel’s** day, did not realize that the Sh’khinah glory of **God** had departed from **the Temple** because of **their** sin and idol worship (**Ezeki’el 10-11**). **Jeremiah’s** point was that the mere existence of **the Temple** did not guarantee protection. Their only *real* security was that guaranteed security only comes through obedience to the Word of **God** (**Jeremiah 7:5-7**).

All of it was almost too wonderful to be true, thus **Hezekiah himself** requested a **sign** of confirmation. **Hezekiah had asked Isaiah**, “**What will be the sign that ADONAI will heal me and that I will go up to the Temple of the LORD on the third day from now?**” **Isaiah answered**, “**This is the LORD’s sign to you**

that **He** will do what **He** has promised. **Isaiah** asked **Hezekiah** an easy question: **Shall the shadow go forward ten steps, or shall it go back ten steps?** **“It is a simple matter for the shadow to go forward ten steps,”** said **Hezekiah**. Then the prophet **Isaiah** called upon **ADONAI**, and the **LORD** made the shadow go back the ten steps it had gone down on the stairway that **Ahaz** built (**Second Kings 20:8-11; Isaiah 38:7-8**). This was exactly the opposite of **Ahaz’s** refusal to accept a **sign** when offered one (see **Bz - A Sign for Ahaz**). Therefore, the long and the short of it was that **Hezekiah** chose to trust **God**, where **Ahaz** did not.



The king had an option; **he** could choose **the shadow to go forward**, or to go **back**. Since **forward** was the normal pattern for a **shadow** to move, **Hezekiah** chose for **the shadow** to go **back**. It is unclear if the Hebrew word *maaloth* should read sundial, or **steps**. It was either **the sundial of Ahaz**, in which **the shadow** went **back** ten degrees, or **steps** constructed in such a way that **the shadow** of an obelisk (a tall, four-sided shaft of stone, usually tapering and monolithic, that rises to a pyramidal point) might indicate the hours. Both could be true, but either way **the shadow** went **back down ten steps**. The sun and its **shadow** moved in a way that was opposite of its normal movement. It went **back** instead of **forward**. This **sign** guaranteed that **Hezekiah** would recover within three days.

*The Holy Spirit transports us to **the king’s** bedside. There lies **the king** on **his** bed, but **his face** was no longer **turned to the wall**. With joy and hope brightening **his** eyes, **he** looks out of **his** window to the gardens below, in the middle of which, and in full view, stood **the sundial of Ahaz** with a series of **steps***

*leading up to it. Then sun had gone down and at least ten of the **steps** were in **the shadows**. But look again, the once darkened **steps** were then in the brightest sunlight! It was the exact **sign** for which **the king** had asked.*

The illness of **Hezekiah** is an important clue to the significance of **Chapters 38** and **39** as well as the book of **Isaiah** as a whole. A parallel is being drawn between **king** and nation, **Hezekiah** and Jerusalem (which is effectively all that is left of Judah). Both are in crisis, and both have been given a reprieve. But there is more than a hint that, just as **Hezekiah's** reprieve was temporary (**fifteen years**), so will Jerusalem's be. In short, the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC at the hands of the Babylonians is already beginning to loom on the horizon of the story. It will be foreshadowed in **Chapter 39** and will dominate the scene from there on.¹⁴⁵