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You Have Put All My Sins Behind Your Back

38: 9-22

DIG: In this song of Hezekiah, what images does he use to talk about death? What aspect of death and dying do they each convey? To what does he credit his temporary deliverance from death? What part has divine forgiveness played in his healing? What resolve does he make in light of that deliverance? What does Hezekiah's psalm here have in common with Psalm 88? What can be concluded from these poems concerning views of the afterlife in the TaNaKh?

REFLECT: Hezekiah realized his illness and his deliverance were both from ADONAI. What does it mean to you that suffering is part of the LORD's plan for you? What role does suffering serve in your life? Hezekiah viewed life as a gift from God to be used for His purposes. How will this affect how you will live out your numbered days? How do you feel about ADONAI throwing all your sins into the depths of the sea?

After **he** was healed, **Hezekiah** wrote a song to express **his** thankfulness to **ADONAI**. At that time, there was a great welling up of praise in **his** heart. **His** song of praise was evidently set to music and sung. This **psalm** of thanksgiving is outside the book of **Psalms** (although many believe that **Hezekiah** composed **Psalm 116** at that time), and makes two important points. First, even the most powerful are helpless before death. And second, **Hezekiah** is not the promised **Messiah**. **Chapters 40 to 66** will speak to that. Therefore, this **psalm** serves to emphasize **Hezekiah's** humanness more than **his** deliverance. In a larger sense, the same can be true of **Judah** and **Jerusalem**. Saved, yes, but most certainly human.

Hezekiah did not claim to be infallible or perfect. **His** mention of **God's** putting away **his sins (38:17)** is evidence enough of that. But **he** is saying on a conscious, intentional level, that **he** has kept **his** promises to **ADONAI**. This is the meaning of walking **faithfully** with **wholehearted devotion**. **He** had not willingly deceived **the LORD** or others. **He** had been careful about what **he** promised and had found the grace of **God** to keep **his** promises. The Hebrew concept of the *heart* is the

control panel of life, where thought, affection, and will come together. The Hebrews did not separate these three aspects of human personality, as if they each function independently of each other. **Hezekiah** said that as far as it was up to **him, his heart** had been focused on only one thing: serving, pleasing and obeying **ADONAI**.

Every believer should aspire to have the same testimony on our deathbed that **Hezekiah** had. To be sure, we live in an increasingly broken and corrupt society, where it is not as easy to be faithful and to have an undivided heart as it may have been for some of our ancestors. But if ever there was a broken and corrupt society, it was the one in which **Hezekiah** lived. Shall we today, **the children of God**, live below the standard of **Hezekiah**?¹⁴⁶

A writing of Hezekiah, king of Judah, after his illness and recovery (38:9). This sounds very familiar to the titles of many of the **Psalms**. This **psalm** might be headed **A Michtam (NKJ) of Hezekiah** since it has the characteristics of **A Michtam of David** in **Psalms 16**. It was composed after **his** illness as a **psalm** of thanksgiving. Like **Psalms 88** and **89**, it has words and phrases that sound like those in the book of **Job**.

The first part of **the psalm** is a lament. **Hezekiah** said: **In the prime of my life must I go through the gates of death and be robbed of the rest of my years? He thought to himself, "I will not again see the LORD, the LORD in the land of the living; no longer will I look on mankind or be with those who now dwell in this world" (38:10-11).** He said his **illness** came **in the prime of his life** and he was facing death at the age of 39. Notice the expression **the gates of sh'ol (NKJ) or death (NIV).** **The gates of death** is a figure of speech for physical **death**. That is what **Christ** meant when **he** said: **and the gates of Hades (Matthew 16:18b).** **Hades** is the Greek name for the place of departed spirits, generally equivalent to the Hebrew **sh'ol**. It is also found in **Job 38:17** and **Psalms 9:13, 107:18**. When **he** says **he would not see the LORD in the land of the living, he** is expressing what **he** will miss at **death**. This expression has the meaning of not being able to appear before **ADONAI** in public worship at the Temple. It is a figure of speech used in **Psalms 11:7** and **17:15**.

Like a shepherd's tent my house, literally encampment, has been pulled down and taken from me. Like a weaver I have rolled up my life and He has cut me off from the loom; day and night you made an end to me (38:12). Here the poet uses two graphic similes that are both figures of death. One of these was the removal of a **shepherd's tent**. Like a **tent** that was moved from

one place to another, so **his life** was to be removed from one place to another. A second figure was a thread cut from a **loom**. When a fabric is finished, it is cut off from the **loom**, and so is **Hezekiah's** life.

Hoping to get well was in vain because **he** got nothing but worse. **I waited patiently till dawn, but like a lion He broke all my bones; day and night you make an end of me. I cried like a swift or thrush, I moaned like a mourning dove. My eyes grew weak as I looked to the heavens. I am troubled; O LORD, come to my aide (38:13-14)! He** groaned **all night** for help, but **his** illness was **like a lion** breaking **all his bones** between **his** powerful jaws (**Job 3:23-26**). At **night** there seemed no hope at all and he was afraid that **he** would not see the light of day. Step by step, **his** life was ebbing away. In some way **his** cries of pain sounded like a bird and **his** moaning like the cooing of a **mourning dove (Isaiah 59:11 and Nahum 2:7)**. As the hours went by, he **looked up to the heavens** for help for so long that his **eyes grew weak**. Why continue to hope? **Hezekiah** knew, and we should know, that although **God** may be the One who sometimes crushes our **bones**, **He** is also the only **One** who cares enough to save us. **Hezekiah** looked to **his** "oppressor" to deliver **him**. **Simon Peter** knew this instinctively when **he** said: **Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life (John 6:68)**.

The second part is **a psalm** of praise and its tone changes as **Hezekiah** looks forward to the joy of **his** recovery. **God** has spoken and answered **his** prayer. **But what can I say? He Himself has spoken to me, and He Himself has done this. I will walk humbly in all my years because of the anguish of my soul (38:15)**. Here **Hezekiah** says **he** will be able to appear before **the LORD** in public worship. That was one of the things **he** said **he** was going to miss if **he** died. **These things I remember as I pour out my soul; how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God (Psalm 42:4)**. This was the desire of **his** heart.



ADONAI, by such things men live; and my spirit finds life in them, too.

There is a lesson here for everyone. **By such things**, by suffering bathed in prayer, by **the LORD's** answer to prayer, and by responding commitment. Here is a way of life that all should practice. **Hezekiah** could vouch for it in his own experience. **His spirit** found life and vigor as a result. **He** could say, when I called out in weakness for **Your** strength, **You restored me to health and let me live (38:16)**. Not only that, **ADONAI** promises that **He will have compassion on us, He will subdue our iniquities. Moreover, He will throw all of our sins into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19)**.

Hezekiah says: **Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction (38:17)**. **He** was saying that **he** had been kept from the grave or physical death by a physical healing. The special mode of capture referred to in this text is by means of **the pit**. A hole is dug in the ground, and covered over with the branches of trees and with sod. The animal treading on this slight covering falls into **the pit**, where it is either taken out alive or killed by the hunters on their arrival.¹⁴⁷ **Hezekiah** affirms that **God** is **his** strength and was grateful that **ADONAI** restored him to health. With hindsight, **he** could see that **it was** really **for his benefit** that it happened (**Romans 8:28**). During **his** illness **he** sensed **God's love**, felt that **the LORD** was gracious to **him** by saving **his** life and not dealing with **him** as **his sins** deserved.

He speaks of physical death when **he** says: **For the grave cannot praise You, death cannot sing Your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness (38:18)**. Remember, under the Torah, long life was one of the promises for obedience. This isn't necessarily true for the believer today. But to be cut short at a young age was, in the TaNaKh, a sign of divine displeasure. But progressive revelation tells us that we have more light than **Hezekiah** had concerning the abode of the dead. The statement **death cannot sing your praise** means walking in the solemn funeral procession. These verses do not teach soul sleep as the Seventh Day Adventists teach. Certainly, the dead could not praise **God** here on earth. In heaven, yes. But not on the earth. This was one of the things **he** said **he** would miss at death.

The living, the living - they praise you, as I am doing today; fathers tell their children about your faithfulness (38:19). In contrast to the dead, it is **the living** that **praise Him**. When **he** says **fathers tell their children about Your faithfulness**, **he** recognizes that now **he** will have sons. Manasseh, who was one of the worst kings in the history of Judah would be **his** son. Even for godly parents,

sometimes the most fervent wishes and desires for our children do not come true. The world (**1 Jn 2:15-17**), the flesh (**Mk 14:38**), and the devil (**1 Pet 5:8**) are still at work. This was true, even for such a godly man as **Hezekiah**. But as for **Hezekiah himself, God saved him**. Now **he** hoped that **he** and **his** sons would praise **God** together. **God will save me, and we will sing with stringed instruments all the days of our lives in the Temple of the LORD (38:20)**.

Isaiah had said: **Prepare a poultice of figs and apply it to the boil, and he will recover. Hezekiah** had asked: **What will be the sign that I will go up to the Temple of the LORD (38:21-22)?** These verses are merely explanatory notes, giving background to what has already been presented in **38:7**. An abbreviation, they were never intended to include earlier details given in **Isaiah** or in **Second Kings 20:1-11**. It should be noted that it was **God** who did the healing, but there was a human element to aid the process. **Figs** were placed upon **the boil**. According to **Second Kings 20:5**, **Isaiah** had promised **Hezekiah** that **he** would be in **the Temple** in three days' time praising **God**. **Hezekiah** requested confirmation of that promise. **What will be the sign that the LORD will heal me and that I will go up to the Temple of the LORD three days** from now? **God's** response was the backward movement of the sun's shadow, suggesting both reprieve from the darkness of death and increased time for life.¹⁴⁸

When **Hezekiah** asked for a **sign**, **he** was not "testing" **God** in a negative sense such as in **Deuteronomy 6:16** or **Matthew 4:7**. **He** was not doubting **God** and, therefore, demanding proof. This kind of testing is forbidden (**Mal 3:15; Mt 12:39; Jn 6:30**). But it is not contrary to the will of **God** to ask for confirmation (**Isaiah 10:7; Judges 6:36-40; Mal 3:10**). **The LORD** delights in revealing **His** will to those of faith, as **He** did to **Hezekiah**.

It is interesting to note that in generations to come, Jacob, Joseph, Mordecai and others would compare **Hezekiah's** miraculous recovery to the Suffering Servant of **Isaiah 53**. But even after fifteen additional years of life, the death of one-hundred and eighty-five thousand **Assyrian** troops, and the death of Sennacherib, ultimately, **Judah's** efforts to break free from **Assyria** failed. After **Hezekiah's** death, **his** son (the wicked Manasseh 688-642 BC) returned to the pro-Assyrian policy (under Esarhaddon 681-669 BC and Ashurbanipal 669-633 BC) of **his** grandfather Ahaz. **No, Hezekiah was not the promised child of 7:14 and 9:56 (to see link click [ly](#) - The Death of the Suffering Servant)**.