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## The King of Babylon Sent Hezekiah a Gift

### 39: 1-8

**The king of Babylon sent Hezekiah a gift DIG: What treasure is Hezekiah showing off? Why is he strutting his stuff (see Second Chronicles 32:22-25)? How does this puffed up Hezekiah compare with the Hezekiah in 37:20 and 38:15-19? What happened in the meantime?**

**REFLECT: What hero (religious or political) have you idolized? How has seeing his or her faults forced you to look again to Yeshua as the model for your life? Is it harder for you to be faithful during times of hardship, or times of success? Why?**

While the previous chapter presented **Hezekiah** in both a positive and negative light, **Chapter 39** is entirely negative. **Hezekiah**, like **Jerusalem**, is too easily seduced by the world. Trust, faith, and belief in **ADONAI** is a way of life, not a one-time affair. The source of our hope cannot lie in sinful humanity: well-intentioned, but entirely human. No, if there is hope for us it must come from **Someone** greater. **Given that God may be trusted, what then? Given that one-time trust is not enough, how is a life of continuous trust possible? Given that the best of God's people fail, where is our hope?**<sup>149</sup>

**Chapters 38 and 39** form a suitable introduction to **Chapters 40 to 66**, which largely describe **Judah's** future relationship with **the Babylonians**. But more than that, these chapters point us to **the blessed Hope - the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 3:13)**. **Here Hezekiah receives a Babylonian embassy with gifts. Isaiah announces that all that the king and his royal ancestors had accumulated, in addition to his children, would be carried off by the king of Babylon.** This section is written in prose. A parallel passage for this is **Second Kings 20:12-19** and **Second Chronicles 32:24-31**.



**At that time Merodach-Baladan son of Baladan king of Babylon sent Hezekiah letters** (probably encouraging **Hezekiah** to join **Babylon** in rebellion against Assyria) **and a gift, because he had heard of his illness and recovery (Second Kings 20:12; Isaiah 39:1).** **Merodach** means *a rebel*, and **Baladan** means *not the LORD*. Behind that **king**, of course, is Nimrod (see the commentary on **Genesis, to see link click Di - The Line of Ham**), and the Adversary, who is *the archrebel* of **ADONAI** and who is **the god of this world (Second Corinthians 4:4).** **Merodach-Baladan** heard that **Hezekiah** was ill and sent **him a gift**. Wasn't that nice of **him**! But **he** had ulterior motives with this delegation. **Meradach-Baladan** had captured **Babylon** and had ruled from the year 721 BC to 710 BC. But then Sargon II drove him out. **Meradach-Baladan** later recaptured **Babylon** and reigned for nine months from the years 704 BC to 703 BC. Then Sennacherib drove him out again.

This delegation took place when **Meradach-Baladan** was ruling **Babylon** for the second time from 704 BC to 703 BC. **He** was also getting ready to revolt against Assyria and the delegation was sent to involve **Hezekiah** and **Judah** in the plot against Sennacherib. This made **Hezekiah's** lack of discretion all the worse because of **Isaiah's** prophecy that **God** was using Assyria to punish **Judah**. It would lead to the crisis in **Chapters 36** and **37**. So in that sense **Chapters 38** and **39** lead up to the events of **Chapters 36** and **37**. **Merodach-Baladan's** visit preceded Sennacherib's planned attack of Jerusalem in 701. Therefore, these three events happened in this order: **Hezekiah's** illness, **Merodach-Baladan's** visit, and then Sennacherib's planned attack.

After **Hezekiah** was restored to health (see **Gy - Hezekiah Became Ill and Was at the Point of Death**), **he** became rather **proud** and arrogant. In the book of

**Chronicles**, which is **God's** viewpoint of history, we are told: **But Hezekiah's heart was proud and he did not respond to the kindness shown him; therefore, ADONAI's wrath was on him and on Judah and Jerusalem (Second Chronicles 32:25).**

Instead of reading the letter that **Merodach-Baladan** had sent **him**, and spreading **it out before ADONAI** like **he** had done with **Sennacherib (37:14)**, **he** put it aside. **The Babylonians** had flattered **him** and so he gave **them** the VIP treatment. **He** took them on a tour of the grounds of **Jerusalem**. **His pride** got in the way of **his** discernment. **He** had a perfect opportunity to glorify **Ha'Shem** before **the** pagan **Babylonians**, to tell of **His** greatness and of **His** grace. Instead, **he** gave in to the temptation to glorify **himself** and to prove to **the Babylonians** that **he** would be a worthy partner in **her** rebellion against Assyria.

**Hezekiah received the envoys gladly and showed them what was in his storehouses - the silver, the gold, the spices, the fine oil, his entire armory and everything found among his treasures.** At this time, **Hezekiah** still had the riches that David and Solomon had gathered. **There was nothing in his palace or in all his kingdom that Hezekiah did not show him (39:2).** **He** would have been glad to have the support of **Babylon** against the looming Assyrian threat. Instead of trusting **God**, **Hezekiah** trusted in **Babylon** and all the wealth of **Judah**. This was exactly what the first half of the book is warning against. The Gentile nations could not and should not be trusted. However, in pride **Hezekiah showed the Babylonian envoys everything** of value **in his storehouses, palace, and kingdom (Second Chronicles 32:27-30).** It was as if **he** thought those riches belonged to **him** instead of **God**. The scene is very humiliating. It depicts **Hezekiah** running around showing off the wealth of **God** before **the** politely approving **Babylonians**, who in fact had wealth many more times over in **their** own **storehouses** back in **Babylon**. Trusting in the riches of **God** will deliver us from making fools of ourselves in the eyes of the world.

**Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah.** The prophets of **God** needed no invitation to address **the king**, and here **Isaiah** arrives unannounced. When **Isaiah** heard of the foreigners' visit, **he** asked **Hezekiah what they said and where they came from (38:3a).** **Hezekiah answered the second of Isaiah's questions but evaded the first, apparently conscious of the prophet's objection to any flirting with the Babylonian king.** **His** only hope was to make it appear that **he** was being hospitable to these travelers and said: **From a distant land, they came to me from Babylon (38:3b).** **A rabbinic tradition classes**

**Hezekiah among three persons, the others being Cain and Balaam, whom God tested and found wanting. When the prophet came and asked him, "What did those men say, and where did they come from?" He should have replied, "You are a prophet of ADONAI to whom all secrets are known." Instead, he made a show of his greatness saying: They came to me from a distant land. He boasted that they had traveled all that distance to pay honor to him and court his friendship. On account of his arrogance and lack of faith in Ha'Shem, he would be punished. Then the prophet delivered an ominous message to the king.**

But **Isaiah** is not taken in by **Hezekiah's** deception. **He** moved quickly to the gloomy question: **What did they see in your palace? Hezekiah's** answer had a defiant ring to it: **They saw everything in my palace. There is nothing among my treasures that I did not show them (38:4).** Along with **Hezekiah's** lack of discernment there was **pride**. It seemed to have slipped **his** mind that **the treasure** in the Temple was **God's** and not **his**. **He** was a good man and a godly king (**Second Chronicles 31:20-21**), but here **he** was painfully mortal. **He** needed to learn that prayer is not a last resort, but a first defense, that faith, trust, and belief are not a once-in-a-while practice, but a daily habit. This is a good lesson for us all.

With deadly calm **the prophet** announced that the possessions of **Hezekiah's pride** would be taken to **Babylon (Second Kings 24:13, 25:13-17; Second Chronicles 36:7-8 and Daniel 1:2)**. **Hear the word of the LORD of heaven's angelic army (CJB): The time will come when everything in your palace, and all that your father's have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left (39:5-6).** This sin of self-sufficiency that characterized **Hezekiah** and the people of **Judah** would eventually result in their captivity about one hundred and fifty years from the time of this prophecy. Yes, later **Hezekiah** would trust in **the LORD** and the nation would be spared destruction by the Assyrian army. But, as **Isaiah** could see by the inspiration of **God**, **Judah's** reprieve would only be temporary. **Although Hezekiah was the ideal representative of the people, there would still be the Babylonian captivity. Although God had delivered Judah from the Assyrians, they were not delivered from Babylon.** Ironically, **the Babylonians**, who were seducing **Judah** as a friend, would eventually destroy **her**.

Why was **ADONAI** so upset with **Hezekiah**? What was the problem with giving **the emissaries** from **Babylon** a royal tour of the palace? The answer is that in the

world of ancient diplomacy, nothing came free. When **Merodach-Baladan** sent **emissaries** and **a gift** to **Hezekiah**, it wasn't merely a friendly gesture of goodwill on **his** recovery from sickness. Rather, **he** was soliciting **Hezekiah's** help and support in **his** ongoing struggle against **Assyria**. So when **Hezekiah** showed **his emissaries** around, **he** was responding to **the king of Babylon's** overtures of alliance, seeking to show **him** that **he** had the resources to be a useful ally against **Assyria**. In spite of **ADONAI's** miraculous deliverance of **Jerusalem** from the surrounding armies of **Sennacherib** and **the Assyrians** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Gw - Then the Angel of the LORD Put to Death a Hundred and Eighty-Five Thousand Men in the Assyrian Camp**), **Hezekiah** was looking to a political means for solving the **Assyrian** problem through an alliance with **Babylon**. Politics had replaced trust in **God**.

Therefore, far from assuring the security of **Hezekiah's descendants**, the foolish alliance with **Babylon** would only result in some of **his** own **offspring** being shipped off to become **eunuchs in the palace of the Babylonian king**. **God's** judgment upon **the line** of **Hezekiah** had been faithfully carried out, just as **Isaiah** had said: **And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood who will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon (Second Kings 20:18)**. It was this specific word of judgment that was fulfilled in the opening verses of the book of **Dani'el**.

But **some** would be captives in **Babylon** and become **the king's eunuchs**. **Eunuchs** were castrated men who were also employed in various offices of the court. They often became the confidential advisers of the monarch, were frequently men of great influence, and sometimes had high military office (**Jeremiah 34:3**). That was especially the case in Persia, where they acquired great political power, and filled positions of great prominence and sometimes engaged in conspiracy against the life of **the king (Esther 2:21)**. The Hebrew **kings** had **them** in their courts (**First Samuel 7:15; First Kings 7:9; Second Kings 8:6, 9:32, 25:19; First Chronicles 28:1; Jeremiah 29:2, 34:19, 38:7 and 52:25**). Though it was the barbarous custom of eastern sovereigns to mutilate many of their young prisoners in this manner, there is no evidence that the Hebrew **kings** ever did this. The **eunuchs** employed by **them** are supposed to have been imported. The most famous of the Hebrew eunuch was **Dani'el (Dani'el 1:3-7)**, in fulfillment of the prediction of the judgment on the house of David in **Second Kings 20:17-18**.<sup>150</sup> **Hezekiah's descendants** would not have any thoughts of **their** own line and authority, but would merely be content to serve **the king of Babylon**. This would

be the result of generation after generation of refusal to trust in **God**.

**The Babylonian** captivity did not occur because of **Hezekiah's** failure to seize an opportunity to glorify **God** before **the Babylonians**. To be sure, it is intriguing to think of how history may have been different if **he** had, but that is not the point **Isaiah** is making. **Hezekiah's** behavior is illustrative, not contributory. Why did **the Babylonian** captivity occur? Because the nation, like **Hezekiah**, saw trust as a one-time affair rather than a way of life. So, **Hezekiah's** reign, perhaps the best overall in **Judah's** history (after the split of the northern kingdom of **Isra'el** and the southern kingdom of **Judah**), was followed by Manasseh's, unquestionably the worst reign (**Second Kings 21:10-15**).

A similar action occurs with **Josiah**, Manasseh's grandson. For reasons the text does not specify, **Josiah** had a heart for **God** and led **his** nation in a remarkable revival (**Second Kings 23:1-3**). Yet after **his** untimely death, the revival seems to have disappeared overnight, and **his** son Jehoiakim led as cynical a regime as one could imagine. It was the people who failed in their trust. They saw trust only as a means of getting their needs met. But that reduces trust into a device for manipulation. When it is used in that way, it is bound to fail, for **ADONAI** cannot be manipulated. The result is the same today as it was in **Judah** and **Isra'el**. People today merely turn to other means of manipulation to supply their needs; in **Israel's** and **Judah's** case, it was the worship of other gods.

Idolatry is merely an attempt to manipulate our environment in such a way as to meet our needs. Because of our sin nature, this idolatrous instinct is embedded within us. And as soon as we abandon trust in **ADONAI**, idolatry in one form or another is waiting in the wings. This is even more likely if we evaluate our successes in life, as **Hezekiah** seems to have done, by our possessions. We keep confusing the ends and means. The intended end of our lives is abundant life, the life in which **God's** fullness is poured into ours. A by-product of that fullness is material blessing. But that is only a by-product. When we make it an end and put it forward as the evidence of our success in life, manipulation of **the Lord** in order to secure that end is almost always inescapable. Manipulation and trust are incompatible.<sup>151</sup>

The reason that **Hezekiah's** heart was pure, was that when **he** was rebuked, **he** repented on the spot, saying: **The word of the LORD you have spoken is good**. Then **he** thought: **There will be peace and security in my lifetime (39:8)**. Some have questioned the sincerity of this statement. But **Second Chronicles**

**31:20-21** gives us **God's** estimation of **his** servant. After purifying the Temple, reestablishing the celebration of the Passover and the worship of **God** in the kingdom, **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** inspired the author of the **Chronicles** to write this: **This is what Hezekiah did throughout Judah, doing what was good and right and faithful before the LORD his God. In everything that he undertook in the service of God's temple and in obedience to the law and the commands, he sought his God and worked wholeheartedly. And so, he prospered.** For an evaluation of **Hezekiah's** illness, turn to **Second Chronicles 32:24-26** and **31**.

Because of **God's** estimation of **Hezekiah**, we must not then be cynical and think that **he** was merely relieved that he was not going to be destroyed when responding to **Isaiah** in this verse. No, we must conclude that although **Hezekiah** desired prosperity for **his** descendants it would have been disingenuous of **him** to begrudge the mercy of **God** in delaying judgment. **God is merciful in that He postponed the calamity until after Hezekiah's death. Hezekiah acknowledged his error and submitted to God's will, but we see in the deferment of the punishment evidence of ADONAI's mercy to him.**

Therefore, on the one hand, **Hezekiah** submits with humility to the word of **the LORD** through **His prophet Isaiah**, and feels that **he** has been mercifully spared inasmuch as **God's** blessing of peace and stability would continue. But on the other hand, the same fate that hung over the northern kingdom of **Isra'el** eight years earlier by Assyria, was now hanging over the southern kingdom of **Judah** by **Babylon. As a result, the end of the kingdom of Isra'el and the beginning of the end of the kingdom of Judah coincided during the reign of Hezekiah.**

The message of **Isaiah** does not end here. Several questions have been answered. Yes, **God** is sovereign over the nations. Yes, **God's** counsel and wisdom is superior to human leaders. Yes, **God** can deliver us from the Assyria's of the world. Yes, **God** is the **Promise Keeper** and can be trusted. But there are still questions to be answered. **How can a sinful people become the servants of God? It is clear that He is trustworthy, but getting sinful humans to trust him is another matter altogether, as Chapter 39 makes clear. What will motivate us to trust Him? How can our sinfulness and His holiness be reconciled? How can sinful and rebellious Jacob become holy, and Isra'el submissive Genesis 32:28? Trust God? Yes, but how? Chapters 40 to 66 provide that answer.**