

## Hezekiah's Other Crisis – Isaiah 38

**Introduction** – In Chapter 37 we saw God's miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem from Assyria and the glorious prayer that Hezekiah offered entreating God's actions. "*In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death,*" begins Chapter 38, and if you do the math, it appears this occurred just prior to the events of Ch's 37-38. Isaiah may be organizing these stories logically and not chronologically (note the promise in v6). Ch's 38-39 are a hinge turning us from the theme of the Assyrian threat to a warning of a future Babylonian captivity. We are concluding the first major section of Isaiah only to find out that he is only getting warmed up.

**The Threat of Death, Prayer, and the Will of God** – Hezekiah had been the most faithful king since David (2 Chron 29-32, 2 Kings 18:5). Nevertheless, Isaiah brings a message that Hezekiah's illness will bring forth his death (v1). The king turns away from all else and prays to the LORD, weeping bitterly (vv2-3). The LORD answers through Isaiah, relenting from his declaration and promising Hezekiah an additional 15 years of life (v5). The LORD also promises to deliver the king and the city from Assyria (v6). And then He gives Hezekiah a strange sign, moving the shadow on a sundial "*ten degrees backward*" (v8). Isaiah instructs the king to have a poultice of figs applied to a boil that apparently is what is threatening his life and is healed (v21). Finally, Hezekiah writes a psalm (quite dark at times) of thanksgiving (vv10-20).

**Truths that Declare the Sovereignty of God over All Creation and History** – Isaiah teaches us much about the sovereignty of God in this chapter through the narrative.

**God's Unchanging Character and Ability to Relent** – God is always ready for us to come to Him and entreat Him to change things. He welcomes Hezekiah's prayer and sees his tears. It is not a game with words to say that part of the unchangeable nature of God is that He is a God Who Relents (Jonah 4:1-2, Jer 18:5-10). This is what mercy is; this is what mercy does.

**The Ironic Sundial-Steps of Ahaz** – When the shadow goes down on the "*sundial of Ahaz*" this is probably referring to the idolatrous altar that Ahaz had built after returning from Baal-worshipping Israel (2 Kings 16). The sign showed that the kingdom of Judah, which was on its deathbed because of wicked Ahaz's unbelief and idolatry, was going to be given an increase of years. Ahaz, committed to his unbelief, had refused any sign offered by God (Isaiah 7); Hezekiah, because he believed, asked for a sign and received one (38:22).

**Creation, Light and Time** – It is fascinating, in light of old-earth/young-earth debates amongst creationists, to consider the sovereignty of God over light and time. We know God turned back the sun in some fashion, giving the "appearance" of a younger day, but we do not know "how" God did it. God is not bound by so-called "natural-laws." These only describe how God usually works by the word of His power in His providential care of all creation. This event in Hezekiah's life helps to understand that appearance of age in creation on the day of creation (or in those six days) could be a design-feature and not some slight-of-hand by God. And this leads to the next section:

**Parallels that Declare the Sovereignty of God in Every Journey and the Salvation of the World** - God has declared the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10) and as the perfect Story-teller, His sovereign hand is to be found in every micro-story – even yours.

**Hezekiah and Jerusalem** – Both are in crisis. Both are given a reprieve. Both reprieves are, however, temporary (Hezekiah's is fifteen years and we will hear about Jerusalem in the next chapter). Both are *types* of something greater than what they are and so both will fade away. Hezekiah is not "*Immanuel*" and old Jerusalem is not the New Jerusalem.

**Hezekiah and Ahaz** – We already considered the receiving of "signs" above. But in addition, in the parallel account in 2 Kings, God says that He will grant Hezekiah life "*for My own sake, and for the sake of My servant David*" (2 Kings 20:6). David's throne was to last forever, but at 39 years of age, Hezekiah still did not have a son. Manasseh would not be born for three more years. If Hezekiah was not that promised Immanuel-Messiah, even more God will twist the story, for Manasseh would be the worst king Judah had ever seen.

**Hezekiah and Immanuel** – Both Hezekiah and Jesus are told they are going to die. Both withdraw and seek the LORD with great agony (Isaiah 38:2-3, Luke 22:39-44). Both are satisfied with the answer, although quite opposite answers, from God (Isaiah 38:20, Luke 22:42, Heb 12:2). God relents for Hezekiah so that a son of David might be born. The Father is pleased not to relent towards His Son who dies for the sins of the world. And because God was pleased to put to death His Son, we know of resurrection life far better than Hezekiah did, who only received 15 years.

**This Side of the Resurrection of the True Son of Hezekiah** – Hezekiah's story is a shadow of the death and resurrection story. Because Hezekiah lived on that side of the resurrection of Jesus, his view of death was true but imperfect (Isaiah 38:10-12, 18). We live on the other side of the resurrection of Jesus. We are able to "see" the story of the salvation of the world, of the New Jerusalem, of the New Humanity, with far clearer vision than a man who miraculously was granted life on his deathbed. We know that to depart and be with Christ is so wonderful (Phil 1:23) that death no longer has any sting (1 Cor 15:55-57). And because we know this, we can "*...be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the world of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord*" (v58).