

A Trek Through Isaiah 31 - 38:1 – 39:8

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For this week: 38:1 - 39:8 Hezekiah and the way of faith

Context in the book

- Starting the book of the Servant: How will God's people be redeemed from captivity?
- Historical section
- Transition from Assyrian period to Babylonian period

Historical context

- These events likely happened around 702 BC during Merodach-Baladan's nine-month reign in Babylon; prior to the Assyrian assault on Jerusalem.

Structure of the section

- Hezekiah's sickness and recovery (38)
- Visit of the Babylonian envoys (39)

Parallel passages

- 2 Ki 20:1-11, 2 Ch 32:24-26

Hezekiah's sickness and recovery 38:1-22

- Here is background for the upcoming test of faith.

The events 38:1-8

Hezekiah becomes sick, prays to Yahweh, and is given healing and assurance that Assyria will not conquer Jerusalem.

Hezekiah becomes sick 38:1

Isaiah 38:1 (LSB)

1In those days Hezekiah became ill to the point of death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, "Thus says Yahweh, 'Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.'"

- In those days.
 - Likely in 702 during Merodach-Baladan's nine-month reign in Babylon.
 - Just prior to the Assyrian invasion of Judah.
- Thus says Yahweh.
 - Death is certain unless Hezekiah seeks Yahweh.

Hezekiah's prayer 38:2-3

Isaiah 38:2-3 (LSB)

2Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to Yahweh

3and said, "Remember now, O Yahweh, I beseech You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a whole heart and have done what is good in Your sight." And Hezekiah wept greatly.

- V2 Seeking Yahweh
 - Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to Yahweh
 - The response of faith in a hopeless situation.
- V3 Petition and lament
 - I beseech You. Plea for mercy
 - walked before You in truth and with a whole heart.
 - Right motive. As David.
 - Done what is good in Your sight.
 - Not perfection
 - Leaving judgment to Yahweh
 - Wept greatly
 - At the thought of dying at age 39.
 - Because he had no heir, so the line of David would be broken.
 - Because the nation would be without a leader to face the Assyrian threat.
- Appeal but no rage or demanding. Leaving the outcome to his God.

Yahweh's reply 38:4-8

Isaiah 38:4-8 (LSB)

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

5 "Go and say to Hezekiah, 'Thus says Yahweh, the God of your father David, "I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears; behold, I will add fifteen years to your life.

6 "And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city."

7 "Now this shall be the sign to you from Yahweh, that Yahweh will do this word that He has spoken:

8 "Behold, I will cause the shadow on the stairway, which has gone down with the sun on the stairway of Ahaz, to go back ten steps." So the sun's shadow went back ten steps on the stairway on which it had gone down.

- V4-5a Yahweh speaks
 - V5 Go and say to Hezekiah
 - Before Isaiah had gone out into the middle court (2 Ki 20:4)
 - V5 Yahweh, the God of David your father
 - 2 Ki 20:6 ...I will defend this city for my own sake and for my servant David's sake.
 - Re the Davidic covenant
 - The promise made to David 1 Ch 17:14
 - The coming descendent of David who makes forgiveness possible
 - V5 I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears.
 - Hezekiah's prayer did not change God's will. Rather, God's will was that Hezekiah should come to the end of himself, then pray and be delivered.
- V5b-6 The promises
 - 15y added to Hezekiah's life
 - Hezekiah & Jerusalem delivered
 - The city defended.
- V7-8 The sign
 - As requested by Hezekiah (2 Ki 20:10)
 - Hezekiah wished to trust Yahweh but needed strengthening. As Gideon (Jdg 6:36-40) or the man with the demon-possessed son: "I believe, help my unbelief!" (Mk 9:24)
 - Contrast Ahaz who did not want to trust Yahweh
 - Promised
 - Behold, I will cause the shadow on the stairway, which has gone down with the sun on the stairway of Ahaz, to go back ten steps.
 - A miracle
 - Delivered
 - So the sun's shadow went back ten steps on the stairway on which it had gone down.
 - Maybe a graphic illustration of Hezekiah's reprieve from death
 - Linked to Ahaz: same question as before: will you believe?

Hezekiah's witness 38:9-20

- Hezekiah acknowledges the blessing given to him and expresses his trust in Yahweh.
- Only in the Isaiah account.
- Three points
 - Human helplessness
 - Divine faithfulness
 - Hezekiah is not the Messiah

Introduction 38:9

Isaiah 38:9 (LSB)

9A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah after his illness and recovery:

- By Hezekiah
- Meditation on what Yahweh has done

Lament 38:10-14

Isaiah 38:10–14 (LSB)

10I said, "In the middle of my life I am to enter the gates of Sheol; I am to be deprived of the rest of my years."

11I said, "I will not see Yah, Yah in the land of the living; I will look on man no more among the inhabitants of the world.

12"Like a shepherd's tent my dwelling is pulled up and removed from me; As a weaver I rolled up my life. He cuts me off from the loom; From day until night You make an end of me.

13"I soothed my soul until morning. Like a lion—so He shatters all my bones; From day until night You make an end of me.

14"Like a swallow, like a crane, so I chirped; I moan like a dove; My eyes look wistfully to the heights; O Lord, I am oppressed, be my security.

- V10 time in this world ended prematurely.
 - In the middle of my life
 - Prime of life
 - gates of Sheol
 - Will close behind him.
 - Deprived of the rest of my years.
 - Years expected now gone
- V11 Alone
 - Loss of fellowship with God
 - Loss of fellowship with men
- V12-14a Feelings
 - Dwelling removed. Fragility of life. A temporary abode (shepherd's tent) forcibly removed to another place.
 - Weaving cut off. Decisiveness of death. Weaving done; now to be rolled up. Man weaves but Yahweh does the cutting.
 - From day until night. Heb idiom: happened unexpectedly during the day; completed by night. 2x for emphasis.
 - I soothed my soul until morning.
 - Difficult translation. Maybe I waited or I groaned
 - Like a lion - so He shatters all my bones.
 - Irresistible
 - Chirp and moan. Prayer seems futile and wearying.
 - Look wistfully to the heights. Longing for God.
- V14b Plea
 - I am oppressed;
 - Stating his condition: weak and helpless
 - be my security!
 - Picture of providing payment for the debt of sin
 - Hezekiah looks to his Oppressor for his deliverance

Response to deliverance 38:15-17

Isaiah 38:15–17 (LSB)

15“What shall I say? Indeed, He has spoken to me, and He Himself has done it; I will wander about all my years because of the bitterness of my soul.

16“O Lord, by these things men live, And in all these is the life of my spirit; O restore me to health and let me live!

17“Behold, for my own well-being I had great bitterness; But it is You who has held back my soul from the pit of nothingness, For You have cast all my sins behind Your back.

- V15-16 Difficult translation. Some say lament & plea. Others (and I) say gratitude for deliverance.
- V15 Response to grace
 - What shall I say? Amazement
 - Indeed He has spoken to me, and He Himself has done it.
 - Into Hezekiah's hopeless situation God has spoken and He has acted to deliver.
 - I will wander about all my years
 - Better “I will walk slowly and carefully”
 - For his remaining time he will walk humbly before his God.
 - Contrast Ahaz.
 - because of the bitterness of my soul.
 - Recalling the despair that he has been rescued from
- V16 Dependence on the sovereign Lord
 - O Lord
 - The sovereign One
 - By these...all these
 - God's words and deeds
 - Men live...is the life of my spirit
 - Recognizing his dependence on God
 - Restore me to health and let me live
 - Restore the vigor and effectiveness he had before his sickness
- V17 Recognizing the goodness of Yahweh
 - Behold. What Hezekiah has learned. Not what he expected or deserved
 - for my own well-being I had great bitterness
 - His bitterness was great but the result was good.
 - As Heb 12:11. And all discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful, but to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.
 - But it is You who has held back my soul from the pit of nothingness,
 - Held back. Lit loved
 - Yahweh's love has rescued him from the pit.
 - For You have cast all my sins behind Your back.
 - His sins are put away to be seen no more.
 - Here is the gospel: Hezekiah was lost. Yahweh saved him because He loved him.
 - How can Yahweh do this and still be the righteous Judge? Wait and see.

Basis for deliverance: the dead and the living 38:18-19

Isaiah 38:18–19 (LSB)

18“For Sheol cannot thank You; Death cannot praise You; Those who go down to the pit cannot keep watch for Your truth.

19“It is the living, the living who give thanks to You, as I do today; A father makes known to his sons about Your truth.

- V18 The dead
 - Sheol cannot thank You; death cannot praise You
 - Yahweh delights in praise from His people, but the dead do not thank or praise Him.
 - Speaking of those who die still in their sin.
- V19 The living
 - It is the living, the living who give thanks to You, as I do today
 - The living thank God
 - By God’s grace, Hezekiah is one of the living
- A father makes known to his sons about Your truth.
 - At this time Hezekiah has no heir but he trusts that Yahweh will continue the line of David.
 - His intention is to teach his son about Yahweh’s faithfulness.
 - Manassah was born three years later. He turned away from Yahweh but repented at the end of his life. 2 Ch 33:12-13

Trust 38:20

Isaiah 38:20 (LSB)

20“Yahweh is here to save me; So we will play my songs on stringed instruments All the days of our life at the house of Yahweh.”

- Yahweh is here to save me.
 - Lit all out to save me.
 - Personal salvation
 - God purposing and accomplishing.
- we will play my songs on stringed instruments
 - Hezekiah considered music important. He had restored singing as part of temple worship. (2 Ch 29:30)
 - Isaiah told him that he would go up to the house of Yahweh on the third day. (2 KI 20:5)
 - Community praise using songs either composed or selected by Hezekiah
- All the days of our life
 - Acknowledging the gift of life that he has just received
- at the house of Yahweh.
 - The place of atoning sacrifice
 - The place of fellowship with God.

The heart of the matter 38:21-22

Isaiah 38:21–22 (LSB)

21 Now Isaiah had said, “Let them take up a cake of figs and apply it to the boil, that he may live.”

22 Then Hezekiah had said, “What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of Yahweh?”

- V21 Isaiah’s words
 - Now Isaiah had said, “Let them take a cake of figs and apply it to the boil, that he may live.”
 - Recalling Yahweh’s promises
- V22 Hezekiah’s words
 - Then Hezekiah had said, “What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of Yahweh?”
 - Recalling Hezekiah’s response of faith: wanting to believe, asking for a sign, which was given.
- Out of order w the narrative in 2 Ki 20. Why?
 - Deliberate
 - To remind us of the essential point of 38: in response to Yahweh’s answer to his prayer, Hezekiah demonstrated true faith, wanting to believe, asking for a sign.
 - Contrast with 39 where Hezekiah is once again seduced by the nations.

The test of faith 39:1-8

The Babylonian embassy 39:1

Isaiah 39:1 (LSB)

1 At that time Merodach-baladan son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that he had been sick and was growing stronger.

- At that time
 - After Hezekiah’s sickness and recovery
 - Before the Assyrian invasion
- Merodach-baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon,
 - Rising power in the east
 - To Hezekiah, a potential solution to the Assyrian problem
- sent letters and a present to Hezekiah
 - Present: building a relationship
 - Letters: Likely proposing an alliance
- for he heard that he had been sick and was growing stronger.
 - Seeing the political opportunity

Hezekiah's response 38:2

Isaiah 39:2 (LSB)

2And Hezekiah was glad about these things and showed them all his treasure house, the silver and the gold and the spices and the good oil and his whole armory and all that was found in his treasuries. There was nothing in his house nor in all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them.

- was glad about these things
 - Merodach-Baladan's approach worked
 - Hezekiah's response partly courtesy, partly pride
- Showed them all.
 - A wasted opportunity.
 - Hezekiah could have exalted Yahweh and proclaimed the truths in Is 38:17
 - As Jesus speaking with Nicodemus in Jn 3: not flattered, went right to the truth.
 - Instead he exalted himself and sought alliance with Babylon.
 - Exactly what Isaiah had been preaching against in 7-37.

Isaiah's inquiry 39:3-4

Isaiah 39:3-4 (LSB)

3Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah and said to him, "What did these men say, and from where have they come to you?" And Hezekiah said, "They have come to me from a far country, from Babylon."

4And he said, "What have they seen in your house?" So Hezekiah said, "They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing among my treasuries that I have not shown them."

- Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah
 - Unannounced
 - Coming in his official capacity as prophet of Yahweh
- and said to him, "What did these men say? And from where have they come to you?"
 - Not to find out. To focus Hezekiah on what he had done
 - What did these men say?
 - Their agenda: Encouragement in Judah's revolt against Assyria.
 - From where did they come to you?
 - Their origin: From Babylon, the coming center of opposition to God
- Hezekiah said, "They have come to me from a far country, from Babylon."
 - Hezekiah only answers one of the questions.
 - His answer shows his pride
 - That his fame had reached to Babylon
 - That someone like Merodach-Baladan would approach him.
 - Hides from the other question. Knew his guilt before Yahweh.
- And he (Isaiah) said, "What have they seen in your house?"
 - How Hezekiah had responded: They have seen all

The word of Yahweh 39:5-7

Isaiah 39:5–7 (LSB)

5Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of Yahweh of hosts,

6‘Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house and all that your fathers have treasured up to this day will be carried to Babylon; nothing will be left,’ says Yahweh.

7‘And some of your sons who will issue from you, whom you will beget, will be taken away, and they will become officials in the palace of the king of Babylon.’”

- Reaping what was sown.
- All shown. All to go to Babylon.
- Royal house to be ended. Sons will become officials in Babylon. But David’s line does not end.
- Note that Hezekiah’s action was not the cause of the Babylonian captivity but the occasion. Predicted as early as Lev 26:33 that Israel would be taken out of the land.

Hezekiah's response 39:8

Isaiah 39:8 (LSB)

8Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “The word of Yahweh which you have spoken is good.” For he said, “For there will be peace and truth in my days.”

- Must be read in light of 2 Ch 32:26 However, Hezekiah humbled the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of Yahweh did not come on them in the days of Hezekiah.
- The word of Yahweh which you have spoken is good.
 - Good. Just, right.
 - Humble acknowledgment that Isaiah spoke truly.
- For he said, “For there will be peace and truth in my days.”
 - Not selfish.
 - Taking comfort that judgment was not imminent; Jerusalem would be rescued from Assyria.
 - However, judgment was coming in the future.

What we have learned in 7-39

- True security is found in Yahweh alone.
- A King is coming who will reign on David’s throne in Zion over a redeemed people forever.
- It’s not Hezekiah or any other earthly king.

Isaiah’s prophecy is incomplete. Unanswered questions

- How can a sinful rebellious people be redeemed and reconciled to a holy God.
- How can they be transformed into servants worthy of Him?
- How can the evil world city finally be destroyed and the city of God established?

Will be answered in 40-66.

Application: What have we learned?

Read Is 38:17.

for my own well-being I had great bitterness

- Hezekiah learned that great bitterness brought great blessing
- Bitterness
 - Heb mar: angry, bitter, chafed, disappointed
 - Usage
 - Esau when he realized that Jacob had stolen his blessing (Gen 27:34)
 - Ps 73:21-22 When my heart was embittered And I was pierced within, Then I was senseless and ignorant; I was like an animal before You.
 - Elements
 - Setting expectations
 - Getting angry when we don't get what we expect
 - Helpless to do anything about it
 - Pierced to the heart
 - Senseless and ignorant, like an animal before God.
- Questions for us
 - When we get bitter, do we see that we have sinned before God?
 - Not content with His provision. Making ourselves God.
 - Ph 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!
 - Have we confessed our sin to Him and been forgiven?
 - 1 Jn 1:8-10 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.
 - Have we become thankful for what we were bitter about?
 - Heb 12:10 ... He disciplines us for our benefit, so that we may share His holiness.
 - Do we appreciate our Lord's faithfulness and patience towards us?
 - Ps 73:23-24 Nevertheless I am continually with You; You have taken hold of my right hand. With Your counsel You will lead me, And afterward take me in glory.

But it is You who has held back my soul from the pit of nothingness

- Hezekiah learned
 - that he was saved by Yahweh alone, not because of what he had done.
 - That he was saved because Yahweh loved him.
- Questions for us
 - Do we realize that our salvation is all of God and none of us?
 - Eph 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, so that no one may boast.
 - Do we realize how much God loves us?
 - Ro 5:8 While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.
 - Eph 3:18-19 <That you> may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

For You have cast all my sins behind Your back.

- Hezekiah learned that God had forgiven his sins (although he didn't know how)
- Questions for us
 - Do we realize that in Christ all our sins are forgiven: past, present, future?
 - Ps 139:1 O Yahweh, You have searched me and known me.
 - Ro 3:23-24 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;
 - Have we confessed our sins and received God's forgiveness and cleansing?
 - 1 Jn 1:8-10 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.
 - Having confessed, are we still condemning ourselves for our past?
 - Ro 8:1 Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
 - Phil 4:8-9 ...forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

References

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