



## ISAIAH 38

### HEZEKIAH'S ILLNESS ~ HEZEKIAH'S PSALM OF PRAISE

Hezekiah, the reigning king of the nation of Judah, is very sick and the Lord tells Isaiah to give the king a message. The message is simple and straightforward... “Set your house in order, for you shall die, you shall not recover.” Story over, right? Not so fast.

The king could have responded to Isaiah’s word from the Lord a couple different ways. What he does do is pray. He broke down, turned his face to the wall and prayed for mercy. God relents and gives Hezekiah more time. Not only that, but he promises to rescue Israel from the hands of the approaching nation of Assyria. The king’s response to God’s merciful plan was to write God a poem touting his goodness.

So, here’s the question...What can we learn from this story that might help us understand the heart of God? The story is mostly about God’s heart for his people, not the King’s prayer. Yet, most of the words spoken in Chapter 38 are Hezekiah’s words, not Gods. What do the king’s words reveal about God’s heart for us?

English Standard (ESV)	Passion Notes	Passion Translation (TPT)
<p>Isaiah 38:1 In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him, and said to him, “Thus says the LORD: Set your house in order, for you shall die, you shall not recover.”<sup>2</sup> Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD,<sup>3</sup> and said, “Please, O LORD, remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.</p> <p><sup>4</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah:<sup>5</sup> “Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will add fifteen years to your life.<sup>6</sup> I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and will defend this city.</p>		<p><b>Hezekiah’s Illness</b></p> <p>Isaiah 38:1 Now, Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz, came and prophesied to him, saying, “This is what Yahweh has to say to you: Set your affairs in order, for you will not recover from this illness. You are going to die.”<sup>2</sup> Then Hezekiah broke down and wept, turned his face to the wall, and prayed, “O please, Yahweh, please. I beg you, let me live.<sup>3</sup> Remember how I have walked faithfully before your face. With all my heart, I have sought to do only what is good in your eyes.” Bitter tears streamed down his face.</p> <p><sup>4</sup> Then Isaiah received another prophetic word for Hezekiah. Yahweh said to him,<sup>5</sup> “Go deliver this message to Hezekiah: ‘This is what Yahweh, the God of your ancestor David, has to say to you: I have heard your heartfelt prayer and I have seen you cry tear after bitter tear. I will give you another fifteen years.<sup>6</sup> I will defend Jerusalem, and I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria.</p>

English Standard (ESV)	Passion Translation (TPT)	Passion Translation (TPT)
<p><sup>7</sup> “This shall be the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do this thing that he has promised: <sup>8</sup> Behold, I will make the shadow cast by the declining sun on the dial of Ahaz turn back ten steps.” So the sun turned back on the dial the ten steps by which it had declined. <sup>9</sup> A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, after he had been sick and had recovered from his sickness:</p> <p><sup>10</sup> I said, In the middle of my days I must depart; I am consigned to the gates of Sheol for the rest of my years. <sup>11</sup> I said, I shall not see the LORD, the LORD in the land of the living; I shall look on man no more among the inhabitants of the world. <sup>12</sup> My dwelling is plucked up and removed from me like a shepherd’s tent; like a weaver I have rolled up my life; he cuts me off from the loom; from day to night you bring me to an end; <sup>13</sup> I calmed myself until morning; like a lion he breaks all my bones; from day to night you bring me to an end.</p> <p><sup>14</sup> Like a swallow or a crane I chirp; I moan like a dove. My eyes are weary with looking upward. O Lord, I am oppressed; be my pledge of safety! <sup>15</sup> What shall I say? For he has spoken to me, and he himself has done it. I walk slowly all my years because of the bitterness of my soul.</p> <p><sup>16</sup> O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these is the life of my spirit. Oh restore me to health and make me live! <sup>17</sup> Behold, it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness; but in love you have delivered my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back. <sup>18</sup> For Sheol does not thank you; death does not praise you; those who go down to the pit do not hope for your faithfulness. <sup>19</sup> The living, the living, he thanks you, as I do this day; the father makes known to the children your faithfulness.</p> <p><sup>20</sup> The LORD will save me, and we will play my music on stringed instruments all the days of our lives, at the house of the LORD. <sup>21</sup> Now Isaiah had said, “Let them take a cake of figs and apply it to the boil, that he may recover.” <sup>22</sup> Hezekiah also had said, “What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the LORD?”</p>	<p><b>a</b> 38:8 It is possible that these steps functioned as some type of a sundial. See Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, 614, s.v.</p> <p><b>b</b> 38:11 Or “appear before (in the temple).”</p> <p><b>c</b> 38:14 Or “stability.”</p> <p><b>d</b> 38:15 This is almost the same as saying, “It is finished.”</p> <p><b>e</b> 38:15 Or “All my sleep has fled” or “I walk slowly all my years.” The Hebrew is uncertain.</p> <p><b>f</b> 38:15 Or “because of the bitterness of my soul.”</p> <p><b>g</b> 38:16 Or “because of these things (kindness, mercy, acts of love, goodness of God).”</p> <p><b>h</b> 38:16 The meaning of this Hebrew sentence is uncertain.</p> <p><b>i</b> 38:22 Because this verse seems so out of place, many contemporary translations place it between v. 6 and v. 7. See also 2 Kings 20:7–8. Hezekiah was not afraid of asking for a sign, not wanting to make the mistake of his father, Ahaz (Isa. 7:11–13).</p>	<p><sup>7</sup> This will be a sign to you from Yahweh as a confirmation that I will do for you what I have promised. <sup>8</sup> I will cause the sun’s shadow to retreat ten steps on the stairway of Ahaz.” Then the sunlight went back up the ten steps it had gone down. <b>a</b></p> <p><b>Hezekiah’s Psalm of Praise</b></p> <p><sup>9</sup> Here is the poem of Hezekiah, king of Judah, which he wrote when he was healed from his illness: <sup>10</sup> I was dying in the prime of life. I thought, “Must I leave this world now? Must I go through the gates of death and miss out on the rest of my years?” <sup>11</sup> I thought, “I won’t get to see <b>b</b> Yah again in the land of the living. No longer will I see my friends or family nor enjoy the company of anyone living on earth.</p> <p><sup>12</sup> My body is being folded up and taken from me, taken down like a shepherd’s tent. He cuts my life short, as a weaver cuts his cloth from the loom and rolls it up. From day to night, you bring my life to an end. <sup>13</sup> I felt as though a lion were crushing all my bones as I cried out for help until morning. From day to night, you bring my life to an end.</p> <p><sup>14</sup> I could only chirp like a swallow or small bird; I could only moan like a dove. My eyes are weary from looking up into heaven. Yahweh, I am so depressed. Come and be my strength. <b>c</b> <sup>15</sup> But what can I say? For he has spoken to me and told me that he is the one who has done this. <b>d</b> I can’t sleep a wink <b>e</b> because I’m overwhelmed with grief. <b>f</b></p> <p><sup>16</sup> Lord, it is because of your kindness <b>g</b> that life is given. It is in you that my spirit lives. <b>h</b> Now restore my health and give me life again! <sup>17</sup> Truly, it was for my own good that I had this bitter experience. For you loved my soul out of the pit of oblivion. You cast all my sins behind your back. <sup>18</sup> The grave and those buried there cannot praise you. Neither the realm of death nor those who enter it can give you thanks or hope for your faithfulness. <sup>19</sup> It’s the living who thank you as I do today. One generation makes your faithfulness known to the next.</p> <p><sup>20</sup> Yahweh is pleased to heal me and save me! We will sing to the music of stringed instruments every day of our lives in Yahweh’s house.” <sup>21</sup> Now, Isaiah had said to Hezekiah, “Have the physicians apply a poultice of cakes of dried figs to your boil, and you will recover.” <sup>22</sup> And Hezekiah had said, “What will be the sign from God that I will be healed and go up again to worship in Yahweh’s house?” <b>i</b></p>

## Bible Knowledge Commentary

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### - JUDAH'S CAPTIVITY IN BABYLON (CHAPS. 38-39)

- These chapters concern an interesting event in Hezekiah's life. Though God miraculously healed the king, his pride led to national calamity. In chapters 36-37, Hezekiah was a man of faith, but here he was a man of pride. This account is also recorded in 2 Kings 20.
- **Hezekiah's healing from his illness (38:1-8)**
  - **Isaiah's prophecy that Hezekiah would die.**
    - **38:1.** From verse 6 it is clear that Hezekiah's illness preceded Sennacherib's surrounding of Jerusalem, recorded in chapters 36-37. Merodach-Baladan, mentioned in 39:1, ruled from 721 to 710 and nine months in 703-702 B.C. (he ruled before Sennacherib's invasion of Judah in 701). Though chapters 38-39 precede chapters 36-37 chronologically they follow them here because Hezekiah's folly led to the prophecy of the Babylonian Captivity, and because chapters 38-39, as stated earlier, prepare the way for chapters 40-66. Hezekiah's illness included a boil (38:21). Isaiah told him he would die.
  - **Hezekiah's Prayer for a Longer Life.**
    - **38:2-3.** Hezekiah's prayer does not explicitly state a request to live longer, but it is implied. Many have criticized Hezekiah for this request. However, self-preservation characterizes nearly everyone. Hezekiah asked the LORD to remember the good things he had done as king (cf. 2 Kings 18:5-8).
  - **God's Answer to Hezekiah.**
    - **38:4-6.** In response to the king's prayer God said through Isaiah that He would grant the king 15 more years. Since Hezekiah died in 686 B.C. this illness would have been in 701 (see the chart "Kings of Judah and Israel and the Preexilic Prophets," near 1 Kings 12:25-33). In addition, God would not allow the Assyrians to take Jerusalem. These facts would have been a great comfort to Hezekiah.
  - **God's Sign.**
    - **38:7-8.** God confirmed His promise to Hezekiah by a sign (cf. comments on v. 22). Apparently a special stairway had been built as a time device, a kind of sundial. As the sun went down in the west, a shadow would move upward on the staircase so that people could ascertain the time of the day. Interestingly Ahaz had rejected a sign from the LORD (7:10-12) but now on a staircase named for him his son Hezekiah was given a sign. How this miracle of the reversal of the sun's shadow occurred is not known. Perhaps the earth's rotation was reversed or perhaps the sun's rays were somehow refracted.
- **Hezekiah's song of thanksgiving (38:9-20)**
  - **38:9-15.** After he was healed Hezekiah wrote a song to express his thanks to God. His illness came, he said, in the prime of his life. Death was referred to figuratively as having gates through which a person entered (cf. Job 38:17; Pss. 9:13; 107:18). His statement that in death he would not ... see the

LORD does not mean he had no hope of heaven. It probably means that he would no longer have the benefit of enjoying God's blessings in this life. He would be without friends (Isa. 38:11) as his house (his body) was dismantled. By death he would be cut ... off like a cloth being cut from a weaver's loom. He had hoped he would get well (v. 13) but he got worse (vv. 13-14). His illness was as if God were a lion breaking all his bones, a figure of speech depicting his deep inner anguish. In some way his cries of pain were like the sound of a bird and his mourning like the doleful sound of a dove (cf. 59:11; Nahum 2:7). Hezekiah realized that this experience should humble him because God had brought on this illness.

- **38:16-20.** Hezekiah was grateful that God restored him to health. After the experience he could see that it was really for his benefit that it happened (v. 17; cf. Rom. 8:28). He sensed for one thing that God's love was with him and that God did not punish him in accord with what his sins deserved. When he said that those who are dead cannot praise the LORD (Isa. 38:18) he was not denying life after death. He was simply noting that in death one's activities on earth are stopped and that one's service on earth for God terminates (Ps. 30:9). However, Hezekiah affirmed that while he was still alive he would proclaim the Lord's faithfulness (Isa. 38:19). Because the LORD healed him, the king said he would sing to the Lord in the temple.

- **Hezekiah's healing** (38:21-22)

- **38:21-22.** In the parallel account in 2 Kings these two verses in Isaiah precede the giving of the sign (see 2 Kings 20:7-9). A poultice of dried figs, a common treatment for boils and ulcers in those days, applied to the boil (possibly an inflamed ulceration), was used by God medicinally to promote the healing. This is an example of healing occurring because of a combination of prayer, medicine, and God's work. Hezekiah's question, What will be the sign ...? did not evidence lack of faith. In fact it was the opposite. Believing that he would be healed, he asked God for confirmation of His word.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is it about this story that intrigues you most?
2. Hezekiah seems to have been sincere in his prayer. He seemed to have no alternative but to ask God for mercy. Have you ever asked God to be merciful to you? Did you "make your case" based upon your good works, like Hezekiah? What does this approach to prayer reveal about Hezekiah's understanding of what would move the heart of God?
3. Why do you think God responded to Hezekiah's prayer the way he did? Why did he chose to heal the king?
4. In verse 17, Hezekiah says, "Truly, it was for my own good that I had this bitter experience. For you loved my soul out of the pit of oblivion." Do you remember the last time you felt God allowed a difficult experience to happen in your life that was "for your own good?" What did you gain from this experience?

5. If you were going to write a poem to God revealing your gratefulness to him for what he has done for you over the course of your life, list three of the elements of your poem that reveal how you feel about God's love for you? In other words, what are three aspects of God's character that you don't just know about, but you have experienced personally?