
Observations from Isaiah

LESSON XXX : HEZEKIAH'S ILLNESS AND RECOVERY (38:1-39:8)

General outline (from Young's *Isaiah*):

- I. The Crisis and the Messiah (1:1-12:6)
- II. The Theocracy and the Nations (13:1-39:8)
- III. True Deliverance is Found Not in Egypt but in the Lord (28:1-35:10)
- IV. The Connecting Bridge Between Chapters 1-35 and 40-66 (36-39)
 - A. The Conclusion of the Assyrian Period (36,37)
 - B. Introduction to the Babylonian Period (38,39)
 - 1. The Godly Hezekiah (38:1-22)
 - 2. The Babylonian Exile Announced (39:1-8)

Prophecy and Response (38:1-8)

In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, "This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover." Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, "Remember, O LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: "Go and tell Hezekiah, 'This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life. And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of

In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came unto him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live. Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, And said, Remember now, O LORD, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore. Then came the word of the LORD to Isaiah, saying, 38:5 Go, and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years. And I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria: and I will defend this city. And this shall be a sign

In those days hath Hezekiah been sick unto death, and come in unto him doth Isaiah son of Amoz, the prophet, and saith unto him, 'Thus said Jehovah: Give a charge to thy house, for thou [art] dying, and dost not live.' And Hezekiah turneth round his face unto the wall, and prayeth unto Jehovah, and saith, 'I pray thee, O Jehovah, remember, I pray Thee, how I have walked habitually before Thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and that which [is] good in thine eyes I have done;' and Hezekiah weepeth — a great weeping. And a word of Jehovah is unto Isaiah, saying, Go, and thou hast said to Hezekiah, Thus said Jehovah, God of David thy father, 'I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tear, lo, I am adding to thy days fifteen years, and out of the hand of the king of Asshur I deliver thee and this city, and have covered over this city. And this [is] to thee the sign

<i>Assyria. I will defend this city. This is the LORD's sign to you that the LORD will do what he has promised: I will make the shadow cast by the sun go back the ten steps it has gone down on the stairway of Ahaz.' " So the sunlight went back the ten steps it had gone down. (NIV)</i>	<i>unto thee from the LORD, that the LORD will do this thing that he hath spoken; Behold, I will bring again the shadow of the degrees, which is gone down in the sun dial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward. So the sun returned ten degrees, by which degrees it was gone down. (KJV)</i>	<i>from Jehovah, that Jehovah doth this thing that He hath spoken. Lo, I am bringing back the shadow of the degrees that it hath gone down on the degrees of Ahaz, by the sun, backward ten degrees:' and the sun turneth back ten degrees in the degrees that it had gone down. (YLT)</i>
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THE PURPOSE OF THESE CHAPTERS — These chapters form a transition from the previous Assyrian conflict to the coming Babylonian conflict. It also shows what the Lord can do when His people place their trust in Him. But it answers as well the question of ‘who is the Messiah’? Isaiah’s earlier prophecies regarding the Messiah are interpreted by some to find their fulfillment in the godly king Hezekiah. *“[T]he question must be asked, ‘If Hezekiah is the ideal representative of trusting people, why the captivity?’ Or, ‘If God could deliver his people from Assyria, why not Babylon?’ Or, ‘Is not Hezekiah the promised child of 7:14 and 9:5,6? Is he not in fact the Messiah?’ Chs. 38-39 answer these questions for us and in so doing point beyond Hezekiah and the Jerusalem of 700 BC... Thus chs. 36-39 make chs. 40-66 necessary. Given that God may be trusted, what then? Given that salvation is not in Hezekiah, where is it? 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?”* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE PRESENTATIONS OF HEZEKIAH — Chapter 38 gives both a positive and negative presentation of Hezekiah: positive for his confidence in the Lord but negative in the fact of his mortality, proving the prophecies of Isaiah 7-12 are not fulfilled in Hezekiah. Chapter 39 continues by portraying Hezekiah in a purely negative light, *showing how easily man diverts his trust once the pressures are removed. “God’s people are seduced by this world’s values and put their trust in human glory — wealth, arms, luxuries — when all along we live and prosper by God’s good pleasure alone.”* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] *Someone once described Christianity as follows: The church is not a museum for saints, it’s a hospital for sinners’. Be careful when forming your evaluations of your parents / church members. Don’t allow their ‘humanness’ turn you away from Christ.*

‘IN THOSE DAYS...’ — There’s questions concerning the dating of these chapters. One view would take these events to occur at the same time as the Assyrian invasion, determined by the facts of when Hezekiah died plus the Lord adding fifteen years to his life as promised. In favor of this, note 38:6 where the Lord mentions the Assyrian invasion. However Hezekiah may have begun his reign earlier which would make this event about 10 years prior to the Assyrian invasion. This chapter would therefore be included not due to chronological reasons but as a transition into the Babylonian topic in chapters 40-66. Reasons to think Hezekiah’s illness did not occur at the time of the invasion:

- apparently Hezekiah did begin his rule as a co-regent with his father Ahaz in 727/726 BC
- the Babylonian rebel Merodach-baladan seems to have been out of the picture by 703 BC, before the Assyrian invasion

- if Hezekiah had just experienced a great deliverance from Assyria, it is unlikely the Babylonians would have come to congratulate him on his recovery only
- Hezekiah stripped most of the wealth of Jerusalem to pay tribute to Sennacherib during the invasion (2 Kings 18:14-16) which would have left nothing for the Babylonians to be amazed at during their visit. In response to this however, Hezekiah may have recovered much of his loss by looting the remains of the Assyrian army after they left.

HEZEKIAH'S TEARS — Hezekiah's reaction to Isaiah's pronouncement of death was one of turning away in tears. That would have been a natural response.

- Hezekiah at this time was maybe 39 and therefore relatively young to die.
- as an OT believer, his faith was in the Lord but he had no NT hope of resurrection and much more in the dark concerning what we would call 'the hope in Christ'
- Hezekiah apparently had no heir since his son Manasseh ascended the throne at age 12 and the Lord added 15 years to the life of Hezekiah. For a Hebrew to be cut off childless was viewed as a most severe judgement from the Lord.

"Hezekiah's response is instructive. He does not withdraw completely, for he does not withdraw from God. Neither does he rage against God nor does he demand that God heal him in payment for 'services rendered'. Rather, he simply pours out the feelings of a wounded heart to a heavenly Father. No father's heart can be unaffected by such a cry. Nor was God's." [Oswalt, Isaiah]

JUDGE ME ACCORDING TO MY WORKS? — *"Hezekiah's plea focuses on his motivations. None of us, affected by the fallibility and the fallenness of our race, can ever hope to perform perfectly. And if our only hope before God lay in our performance, then we would be truly hopeless. But there is the glad potential for the intentions and motivations to be purified by God's Spirit. Had Hezekiah done everything correctly? Again, of course not. But he could live his life with one desire: to be absolutely faithful to God (Phil 3:7-15; 1 Thes 5:23). It is not necessary to live with divided loyalties between self and God, this world and God. It is God's purpose that his people be able to be true (faithful) to him and that their hearts might be one toward him. When that is so, then what we do, though broken and incomplete, like the blotted drawing of a child, is good in the parent's eyes. The good news of the gospel is that such a profession is not just for the Davidic monarch — it is for all people through Christ."* [Oswalt, Isaiah]

THE SIGN BY WHICH THE LORD PROVES HE WOULD ADD FIFTEEN YEARS TO THE LIFE OF HEZEKIAH — The Lord heard the prayers of Hezekiah and added fifteen years to the life of Hezekiah. This includes a sign of confirmation, which Hezekiah requested according to 2 Kings 20:8. **THE MIRACLE** – The sign given was the sun's shadow reversing itself, either by a miracle of reversing the earth's rotation or a local refraction of the light. *"Attempts to explain this scientifically or to relate it to some calendrical adjustment — perhaps in conjunction with Joshua's long day (Josh 10) — have not carried full conviction with students of science or chronology. It is best to admit that we do not yet know the explanation but to accept the testimony of the word of God to the fact that a miracle took place."* [Grogan, Isaiah] "In regard to this miracle, it seems only necessary to observe that all that is indispensable to be believed is, that the shadow on the dial was made suddenly to recede from any cause. It is evident that this may have been accomplished in several ways. It may have been by arresting the motion of the earth in its revolutions, and causing it to retrograde on its axis to the extent indicated by the return of the shadow, or it may have been by a miraculous bending, or inclining of the rays of the sun. As there

is no evidence that the event was observed elsewhere; and as it is not necessary to suppose that the earth was arrested in its motion, and that the whole frame of the universe was adjusted to this change in the movement of the earth, it is most probable that it was an inclination of the rays of the sun; or a miraculous causing of the shadow itself to recede. This is the whole statement of the sacred writer, and this is all that is necessary to be supposed. What Hezekiah desired was a miracle; a sign that he should recover. That was granted. The retrocession of the shadow in this sudden manner was not a natural event. It could be caused only by God; and this was all that was needed. A simple exertion of divine power on the rays of the sun which rested on the dial, deflecting those rays, would accomplish the whole result. It may be added that it is not recorded, nor is it necessary to an understanding of the subject to suppose, that the bending of the rays was permanent, or that so much time was lost. The miracle was instantaneous, and was satisfactory to Hezekiah, though the rays of the sun casting the shadow may have again been soon returned to their regular position, and the shadow restored to the place in which it would have been had it not been interrupted. No infidel, therefore, can object to this statement, unless he can prove that this could not be done by him who made the sun, and who is himself the fountain of power.” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*]

THE ‘SUN-DIAL’ – *“It is often assumed that the Hebrew ma’aloth (‘steps’) refers here to a sundial in the palace courtyard. There is no other instance of its use in this sense, however, and it probably simply refers to a series of steps and to the play of the shadow of the sun on them.”* [Grogan, *Isaiah*] “Few subjects have perplexed commentators more than this account of the sun-dial of Ahaz. The only other place where a sun-dial is mentioned in the Scriptures is in the parallel place in 2 Kings 20:9,10, where the account is somewhat more full, and the nature of the miracle more fully represented.... Josephus understands this as referring to the stem in the house or palace of Ahaz. ‘He desired that he would make the shadow of the sun which he had already made to go down ten steps in his house, to return again to the same place, and to make it as it was before;’ by which he evidently regarded Hezekiah as requesting that the shadow which had gone down on the steps of the palace should return to its place ten steps backward. It is possible that the time of day may have been indicated by the shadow of the sun on the steps of the palace, and that this may have constituted what was called the sun-dial of Ahaz; but the more probable interpretation is that which regards the dial as a distinct and separate contrivance.” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*]

Hezekiah’s Psalm (38:9-20)

A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah after his illness and recovery: I said, “In the prime of my life must I go through the gates of death and be robbed of the rest of my years?” I said, “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. Like a shepherd’s tent my house has been pulled down and taken from me. Like a

The writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick, and was recovered of his sickness: I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave: I am deprived of the residue of my years. I said, I shall not see the LORD, even the LORD, in the land of the living: I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world. Mine age is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherd’s tent: I have cut off like a weaver my

A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah concerning his being sick, when he reviveth from his sickness: ‘I — I said in the cutting off of my days, I go in to the gates of Sheol, I have numbered the remnant of mine years. I said, I do not see Jah — Jah! In the land of the living, I do not behold man any more, With the inhabitants of the world. My sojourning hath departed, And been removed from me as a shepherd’s tent, I have

weaver I have rolled up my life, and he has cut me off from the loom; day and night you made an end of me. I waited patiently till dawn, but like a lion he broke all my bones; day and night you made 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 aid!" But what can I say? He has spoken to me, and he himself has done this. I will walk humbly all my years because of this anguish of my soul. Lord, by such things men live; and my spirit finds life in them too. You restored me to health and let me live. Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction; you have put all my sins behind your back. For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness. The living, the living — they praise you, as I am doing today; fathers tell their children about your faithfulness. The LORD will save me, and we will sing with stringed instruments all the days of our lives in the temple of the LORD. (NIV)

life: he will cut me off with pining sickness: from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me. I reckoned till morning, that, as a lion, so will he break all my bones: from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me. Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter: I did mourn as a dove: mine eyes fail with looking upward: O LORD, I am oppressed; undertake for me. What shall I say? he hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it: I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul. O LORD, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit: so wilt thou recover me, and make me to live. Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back. For the grave cannot praise thee, death can not celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth. The LORD was ready to save me: therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the LORD. (KJV)

drawn together, as a weaver, my life, By weakness it cutteth me off, From day unto night Thou dost end me. I have set [Him] till morning as a lion, So doth He break all my bones, From day unto night Thou dost end me. As a crane — a swallow — so I chatter, I mourn as a dove, Drawn up have been mine eyes on high, O Jehovah, oppression [is] on me, be my surety. — What do I say? seeing He said to me, And He Himself hath wrought, I go softly all my years for the bitterness of my soul. Lord, by these do [men] live, And by all in them [is] the life of my spirit, And Thou savest me, make me also to live, Lo, to peace He changed for me bitterness, And Thou hast delighted in my soul without corruption, For Thou hast cast behind Thy back all my sins. For Sheol doth not confess Thee, Death doth not praise Thee, Those going down to the pit hope not for Thy truth. The living, the living, he doth confess Thee. Like myself to- day — a father to sons Doth make known of Thy faithfulness, O Jehovah — to save me: And my songs we sing all days of our lives In the house of Jehovah.' (YLT)

A HYMN OF THE REALITY OF LIFE — From the title (v9) one would imagine the psalm to be one of thanksgiving, but except for v19,20 “neither the content nor the form clearly supports such an expectation. On the other hand, although the content and the meter (3/2) point toward a lament, the formal characteristics, such as the opening call to the Lord, are missing. These factors should caution the scholar against forcing the material in one direction or another. They should also raise the question of the significance of the anomalous form: Why is it neither wholly lament

nor wholly thanksgiving? What was the author attempting to convey? ... *Why the heavy emphasis upon mortality and loss? In my view the stress is not so much upon the restoration as it is upon the fallibility of king and people that, despite the present reprieve, must issue in coming destruction. Thus there is thanksgiving for the deliverance from death (and from Assyrian destruction), but that rejoicing is very much muted by the grim realization of death's reality.*" [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

ISAIAH'S THEOLOGY BEHIND THE PSALM — Oswalt makes a couple theological observations concerning Isaiah's use of this psalm. The first coincides with the message he has been attempting to teach for the entire first section of the book: *put your faith in the Lord and not man*. King or commoner, we all face death and there's no respecter of persons with the Lord. On the other hand He is also able to restore and extend life — should not such a One be trusted? The second point has been previously mentioned: *Hezekiah was not the promised Messiah*. Some hold the prophecies in Isaiah find their fulfillment in Hezekiah, and that would have especially been true at the time Isaiah was making these prophecies. But here, despite the faith of Hezekiah and how the Lord used him to deliver Jerusalem, he was not the one in whom all trust should be given. "Of that One a fuller revelation (chs. 40-66) still lies ahead." [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

THE BREVITY OF LIFE — *A repeated theme in these short verses is the sense of helplessness and gloom over Hezekiah's untimely death. He tried to look beyond himself for deliverance but found a silent heaven. "Suddenly all the years upon which he had counted for more achievements and for the enjoyment of those achievements vanish away like a vapor. How easily we human beings consider the years of our lives an inviolate possession. But that is not true. We have only today and perhaps not all of it. We are distinctly dependent creatures, and if such experiences as Hezekiah's help us to face what that fact means for present living and eternal destiny, then they are very salutary experiences indeed."* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] Hezekiah uses two metaphors to illustrate something suddenly disappearing from its expected place: the shepherd's tent and the weaver's loom. The tent is a familiar analogy to NT readers: *'For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.'* (2 Cor 5:1) *'Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me.'* (2 Pet 1:13,14) Likewise the weaver works on a cloth in her loom day after day but when finished, a couple a quick knife strokes frees the cloth and it is rolled up.

TRUE RELIGION: CRYING OUT TO OUR 'OPPRESSOR' (v13) — *"This is an important theological truth. Hezekiah looks to his 'oppressor' for deliverance. This is the only direction which a true monotheism can take. The alternative is a dualism which pits 'bad' gods against 'good' ones. But in the biblical faith, nothing is beyond God's control."* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

'MY PRAYERS WERE AS A CHATTERING BIRD' (v14) — These verses (v14ff) were highlighted by Pastor Fisher in a message years ago and have proven an encouragement to me time and time again. *To Hezekiah, his prayers were as if he were a 'chirping bird', useless repetitious chattering, annoying to the ear. Or like the moaning coo of the dove. But the Lord heard those prayers! What an encouragement to us when the heavens seem as brass and the Lord is silent concerning our pleas!* "Here is an almost Job-like appeal to God against God. The varied cries of Palestine's birds express the varied nature of Hezekiah's many cries to God, now quiet, now shrill, now mournful. The reference to Hezekiah's eyes conveys a picture of concentrated appeal to God and to him alone." [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

REFLECTION UPON GOD’S RESPONSE TO THE CONDITION (v15-20) — These next several verses are complex according to the commentators and may be interpreted either as humility for the gift of fifteen added years, or as a resignation of acceptance for the judgement given to Hezekiah from the Lord (prior to the promise of the added fifteen years). According to Oswalt, a case may be presented for either interpretive slant and both would fit the context. Many take v15,16 to be negative: *‘this sickness is from the Lord and I will submit to His righteous dealings’*; then v17 it turns positive: *‘Something bad was turned to good and Hezekiah would not forget it.’*

THE LORD’S MERCY ON HEZEKIAH’S WAS SYMBOLIC OF THE FORGIVENESS OF HIS SINS (v17) — “As Calvin remarked, and as Jesus demonstrated (Luke 5:17-26), forgiveness of sins and recovery from illness are two sides of God’s saving power. Hezekiah apparently felt that had he died this untimely death it would have been in punishment for sin, perhaps the sin of pride. Now the fact that he is recovering is evidence that God has turned away from Hezekiah’s sin and turned to Hezekiah. *Whatever may be said of Hezekiah’s spiritual condition, the truth may be affirmed that a sense of unforgiven sin is a killer which often bars the way to physical and emotional healing. The corollary of this truth is that the confidence that our sins are buried in the sea of God’s grace is frequently the key to healing in these areas (Ps 103:3,4).*” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

‘THE DEAD DO NOT PRAISE YOU’ (v18) — Similar statements are repeated several times in the OT: Job 10:21,22; Ps 6:5; 30:9; 88:10-12; 115:17; Eccl 9:4-5,10. In the understanding of what is being said, it is important to note *these references are all in poetical books and should be interpreted in that light*. Oswalt likes to understand these verses in the sense of *progressive revelation*, i.e. the Hebrews did not understand the glory of heaven and therefore thought praise ended at death (although Oswalt admits that regardless of how one interprets this, there are difficulties; his understanding to him has the least difficulties). *I prefer to look at these verses in this manner: much of the blessings to the Jews were earth-oriented: bearing children, having a land inheritance, the nation of Israel, etc. Therefore, poetically, to speak of those beyond the grave not praising the Lord is a reference to their praise on earth being finished. That is not to deny the reality of a glorious afterlife; Job knew of redemption and the resurrection: ‘I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes — I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!’ (Job 19:25-27) Daniel had a rather full understanding of eternity: ‘Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.’ (Dan 12:2,3). Later even Isaiah would say ‘As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me, declares the LORD, so will your name and descendants endure.’ (Isa 66:22). Therefore, poetically and in reference to earth, Hezekiah continues in v19,20 to describe the praise in terms of witnessing to others of the Lord’s faithfulness.*

Additional Notes (38:21,22)

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

For Isaiah had said, Let them take a lump of figs, and lay it for a plaister upon the boil, and he shall recover. Hezekiah also had said, What is the sign that I

And Isaiah saith, ‘Let them take a bunch of figs, and plaster over the ulcer, and he liveth.’ And Hezekiah saith, ‘What [is] the sign that I go

up to the temple of the LORD?” (NIV) *shall go up to the house of the LORD? (KJV)* *up to the house of Jehovah!’ (YLT)*

A MISPLACED ADDITION? — Every single commentator I researched consider these verses out of place. “The form of ch. 38, as it appears here, is somewhat enigmatic. Almost all commentators, whatever their critical persuasions, agree that 2 Kings 20:1-11 preserves a better account of the story in that it is fuller and has a more logical sequence of events. It appears that the writer of the Isaiah account, abridging the original (perhaps to gain room for the psalm he wished to include?), inadvertently left out the reference to Isaiah’s poultice and Hezekiah’s request for a sign (2 Kings 20:7,8). He then added these on at the end of the account.... It is also possible that a later editor, knowing of the Kings account, felt that these details were important and added them at the end. If so, this was done early, since both LXX and Targum preserve the same form.... It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that these verses were not a part of the original Isaianic composition.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] Oswalt’s comments are representative of others.

MEDICAL PRACTICALITY AND DIVINE HEALING — “*Evidence from Ras Shamra shows that figs were used in healing. Like the NT use of oil (e.g., James 5:14), the use of means was not reckoned incompatible with divine healing.*” [Grogan, *Isaiah*] “*And lay it for a plaster* The word used here denotes properly to rub, bruise, crush by rubbing; then to rub, in, to anoint, to soften. Here it means they were to take dried figs and lay them softened on the ulcer. *Upon the boil* – This word means a burning sore or an inflamed ulcer (Ex 9:9,11; Lev 13:18-20).... Here it probably denotes a pestilential boil; an eruption, or inflamed ulceration produced by the plague, that threatened immediate death. *Jerome says that the plaster of figs was medicinal, and adapted to reduce the inflammation and restore health. There is no improbability in the supposition; nor does anything in the narrative prohibit us from supposing that natural means might have been used to restore him.* The miracle consisted in the arrest of the shade on the sun-dial, and in the announcement of Isaiah that he would recover.” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*]

Babylonian Seduction (39:1-8)

At that time Merodach-Baladan son of Baladan king of Babylon sent Hezekiah letters and a gift, because he had heard of his illness and recovery. 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. There was nothing in his palace or in all his kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them. Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah and asked, “What

At that time Merodachbaladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah: for he had heard that he had been sick, and was recovered. And Hezekiah was glad of them, and shewed them the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armor, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not. Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king

At that time hath Merodach-Baladan, son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah, when he heareth that he hath been sick, and is become strong. And Hezekiah rejoiceth over them, and sheweth them the house of his spices, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the good ointment, and all the house of his vessels, and all that hath been found in his treasures; there hath not been a thing in his house, and in all his dominion, that Hezekiah hath not shewed them. And Isaiah the prophet cometh in

did those men say, and where did they come from?" "From a distant land," Hezekiah replied. "They came to me from Babylon." The prophet asked, "What did they see in your palace?" "They saw everything in my palace," Hezekiah said. "There is nothing among my treasures that I did not show them." Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD Almighty: The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the LORD. 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." "The word of the LORD you have spoken is good," Hezekiah replied. For he thought, "There will be peace and security in my lifetime." (NIV)

Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country unto me, even from Babylon. Then said he, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All that is in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them. Then said Isaiah to Hezekiah, Hear the word of the LORD of hosts: Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. Then said Hezekiah to Isaiah, Good is the word of the LORD which thou hast spoken. He said moreover, For there shall be peace and truth in my days. (KJV)

unto king Hezekiah, and saith unto him, 'What said these men? and whence come they unto thee?' And Hezekiah saith, 'From a land afar off they have come unto me — from Babylon.' And he saith, 'What saw they in thy house?' and Hezekiah saith, 'All that [is] in my house they saw; there hath not been a thing that I have not shewed them among my treasures.' And Isaiah saith unto Hezekiah, 'Hear a word of Jehovah of Hosts: Lo, days are coming, and borne hath been all that [is] in thy house, and that thy fathers have treasured up till this day, to Babylon; there is not left a thing, said Jehovah; and of thy sons who come forth from thee, whom thou begettest, they take, and they have been eunuchs in a palace of the king of Babylon.' And Hezekiah saith unto Isaiah, 'Good [is] the word of Jehovah that thou hast spoken;' and he saith, 'Because there is peace and truth in my days.' (YLT)

BABYLONIAN ENVOYS — In all probability the arrival of the Babylonians to congratulate Hezekiah on his healing was merely a cover for their real motive (v1). *"And Hezekiah rejoiced over them [v2] is completely understandable from a human point of view. For little Judah to be favored by the attention of Babylon was an opportunity which did not come every day. Furthermore, whether in 712 or 703, Hezekiah would have been very glad to have the support of Babylon as he contemplated the impending arrival of the Assyrian army to put down either of the West Semitic revolts. However, this kind of reliance upon, and delight in, human power and glory is exactly what the first half of the book is warning against."* [Oswalt, Isaiah]

"Merodach-Baladan, known to secular history as Marduk-aplu-idinna, an Aramean, was king of Babylon 721-709 B.C. and again for a brief spell of nine months in 703 B.C. Babylon had known years of greatness in the past and, though now eclipsed by Assyria, was to be great again. Merodach-Baladan's brief success in throwing off the Assyrian yoke was an earnest of this. There was, of course, a political motive for sending his deputation to Hezekiah.... The envoys were taken on a grand tour of the palace and the kingdom (v. 2). Hezekiah's glad reception of them may have

been due to a desire to be involved in concerted action against Assyria, and the display of his wealth would show he had something to offer as a potential ally.” [Grogan, Isaiah]

HEZEKIAH PROMOTES HIMSELF RATHER THAN GOD (v2) — “Here was a ready-made opportunity for Hezekiah to glorify God before the pagan Babylonians, to tell of his greatness and of his grace. Instead, he succumbed to the temptation to glorify himself and to prove to the Chaldeans that he was a worthy partner for any sort of coalition they might have in mind.... An unsavory picture comes to mind of Hezekiah scuttling about showing off his tawdry wealth before the politely approving gaze of the Babylonians, who have in fact seen wealth many times the value of the Judean’s little horde in their own homeland. *Trust in God and his riches will deliver us from the need to make fools of ourselves in the presence of human glory.*” [Oswalt, Isaiah]

HEZEKIAH KNEW HIS BLUNDER (v3,4) — Isaiah shows up at a rather inopportune time for Hezekiah. Rather than any pronouncements, Isaiah merely asks questions to reveal to Hezekiah his error. ‘*Where did these men come from and what did they say?*’ But note Hezekiah didn’t bother relating their conversation — he knew Isaiah would disapprove of any reliance on foreign alliances. His only hope to not be rebuked was to come across as being merely hospitable. Isaiah continues therefore, ‘*what did they see?*’ Hezekiah answered forthrightly, knowing there was no escape from the truth.

THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY PROPHESED AT LEAST 115 YEARS PRIOR TO THE EVENT (v6,7) — “This chapter, perhaps more than any other in the book, tends to reveal the basic presuppositions of commentators. Many place it early in the sixth century and on the sole ground that it purports to predict events that took place then. This then raises the question, Does supernatural prediction really occur? and behind this the even deeper question, What is God’s relationship to his creation and to man?” [Grogan, Isaiah] “*We should not think that this one sin of Hezekiah’s pride doomed Judah to Babylonian captivity. Rather, this sin is illustrative of the kind of pride and refusal to trust that the entire nation would manifest and that would ultimately result in the captivity. Thus this act is not causal but typical.*” [Oswalt, Isaiah]

HEZEKIAH’S RESPONSE: FAVORABLE OR UNFAVORABLE? (v8) — Was Hezekiah’s response sin or faith? Hezekiah does respond in faith and repentance to submissively accept the pronouncements of the Lord as being righteous. If the narrative had only stopped there! “While it may be that Hezekiah is humbly thankful for God’s grace in not bringing the deserved punishment upon him immediately, it is hard to avoid the implication that the real reason for his saying that God’s word is good is merely the human relief that he is not going to be destroyed. Whether his descendants are to be consumed does not seem to affect him. Furthermore, his reaction was quite different when his own demise was imminent (38:3).” [Oswalt, Isaiah] *Note a couple commentators who disagree:* “Hezekiah’s acknowledgment that God’s word was good probably includes a recognition that the judgment was appropriate — because deserved — and that it was not altogether unmixed with grace. Are we then to condemn his final statement as selfish and unfeeling? Probably not. It is more likely to be a thankful recognition that God had not dealt with him personally to the measure of his desert.” [Grogan, Isaiah] “It cannot be shown that Hezekiah was regardless of his posterity, or unconcerned at the calamity which would come upon them. All that the passage fairly implies is that he saw that it was right; and that it was proof of great mercy in God that the punishment was deferred, and was not, as in the case of David (2 Samuel 13,14ff), to be inflicted in his own time.” [Barnes, Notes on OT]

“Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction; you have put all my sins behind your back.”

— Isaiah 38:17 NIV