



Highlights From the Book of Isaiah

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Outline of the Book of Isaiah

I. Isaiah's Warning of Judgment on Israel (1-39)

A. Judgement and Hope for Jerusalem (1-12)

B. Judgement and Hope for the Nations (13-27)

C. True Deliverance Is Found, Not in Egypt, But in the Lord (28-35)

D. The Lessons of History (36-39)

A. The Deliverance of Jerusalem from Assyria (36-37)

B. Hezekiah's Illness and Recovery (38)

C. A Visit From the Envoys of Babylon (39)

II. The Promise of Future Hope in the New Jerusalem (40-66)

The Destruction of Sennacherib

By Lord Byron (George Gordon)

*The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.*

*Like the leaves of the forest when Summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen:
Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.*

*For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever grew still!*

The Destruction of Sennacherib

By Lord Byron (George Gordon)

*And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.*

*And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow, and the rust on his mail:
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.*

*And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!*

The Order of Chapters 36-39

- The events described in Isaiah 36-39 are given in *literary* order rather than *chronological* order.
- The *chronological* order of these events is:
 1. Hezekiah's Sickness and Recovery (38)
 2. A Visit From the Envoys of Babylon (39)
 3. The Deliverance of Jerusalem from Assyria (36-37)
- I *suspect* the reason Isaiah presents this material in the order that he does is:
 - At this point, the book of Isaiah is transitioning from focusing primarily on Assyria (chapters 1-39) to focusing primarily on Babylon (chapters 40-66)
 - So it makes sense to *begin* with material that shows how the threat of Assyria was eliminated and *end* with material that shows how the Babylonians became interested in taking what Judah had.

The Flow of Thought in Chapters 36-39

- Throughout chapters 36-39 Hezekiah's experience is presented as an *object lesson*.
- In chapters 36 and 37 Hezekiah demonstrates how to trust God when faced with an overwhelming physical threat.
- In chapter 38 (the section we begin looking at today):
 - Hezekiah demonstrates how to trust in God while experiencing a serious physical illness.
 - Hezekiah's experience in this chapter also serves as a reminder that he (like all of us) is *mortal* and will one day have to face physical death.
- In chapter 39 we will see that Hezekiah is *fallible*.
- Even though Hezekiah was a good king *overall*, in *this* instance he allowed himself to be led astray by the pressures and worldly thinking of his day.

The Flow of Thought in Chapters 36-39

- Early on, Isaiah had prophesied of a coming glorious king who would deliver his people:
 - *For a child has been born to us, son has been given to us. He shoulders responsibility and is called Wonderful Adviser, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, **Prince** of Peace. His **dominion** will be vast, and he will bring immeasurable prosperity. He will **rule** on David's **throne** and over David's **kingdom**, establishing it and strengthening it by promoting justice and fairness, from this time forward and forevermore. (Isaiah 9:6-7)*
- Seeing the mortality and fallibility of Hezekiah in **Isaiah 38-39**, forces us to recognize that the fulfillment of this glorious prophesy is found, **not** in Hezekiah, but in a king who is yet to come.
- And so the **remainder** of the book of Isaiah (**chapters 40-66**) will go on to tell us even **more** about this coming king and will show us how he, when **he** comes, he will fulfill **all** of the glorious promises of God.

Outline of Events in Chapter 38

- The section we will begin looking at today (Isaiah 38:1-22) can be logically divided into *three* major parts:
 - 38:1-8 – Hezekiah’s Illness
 - 38:9-20 – Hezekiah’s Psalm: a Meditation on Death and Life
 - 38:21-22 – A Description of Hezekiah’s Healing

Hezekiah's Illness (38:1-8)

^{38:1} *In those days Hezekiah was stricken with a terminal illness. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz visited him and told him, "This is what the LORD says, 'Give instructions to your household, for you are about to die; you will not get well.'"* ² *Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD,* ³ *"Please, LORD. Remember how I have served you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion, and how I have carried out your will." Then Hezekiah wept bitterly.* ⁴

Hezekiah's Illness (38:1-8)

38:4 *The LORD's message came to Isaiah, ⁵ "Go and tell Hezekiah: 'This is what the LORD God of your ancestor David says: "I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Look, I will add 15 years to your life. ⁶ I will also rescue you and this city from the king of Assyria. I will shield this city.'"" ⁷ Isaiah replied, "This is your sign from the LORD confirming that the LORD will do what he has said: ⁸ Look, I will make the shadow go back 10 steps on the stairs of Ahaz." And then the shadow went back 10 steps.*

38:1 *In those days* Hezekiah was stricken with a terminal illness. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz visited him and told him, “This is what the LORD says, ‘Give instructions to your household, for **you are about to die; you will not get well.**’”

- “*In those days*” is an indefinite expression that places Hezekiah’s illness near the time of Sennacherib’s (subsequent) invasion described in the preceding two chapters.
- Though the nature of Isaiah’s illness is not stated (38:21 mentions an “*ulcerated sore*”), it was both *serious* and *life threatening*.
- We are not told how long this condition had lasted *prior* to the Isaiah’s arrival, but Isaiah confirmed that the king’s end was near and that he should set his house in order.
- However, Hezekiah did *not* die, and this raises questions as to how Isaiah could, in the name of the LORD, emphatically announce, “*you are about to die; you will not get well*”.

38:1 *In those days Hezekiah was stricken with a terminal illness. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz visited him and told him, “This is what the LORD says, ‘Give instructions to your household, for you are about to die; you will not get well.’”*

- Biblical prophecies of doom were conditional and were given with the intention of causing a change in attitude in the person or nation to whom the prophecy was addressed.
- Such prophecies would state the inevitable outcome *if* nothing changed, but at the same time, there was an implied possibility that the outcome *could* change if there was an appropriate response on the part of those addressed (cf. Jonah 3:3; 4:2; Jer 18:7-10).

38:2 *Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, ³ “Please, LORD. Remember how I have served you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion, and how I have carried out your will.” Then Hezekiah wept bitterly.*

- The announcement of his impending death led Hezekiah to prayer.
- He was a relatively young man, being only thirty-nine at the time. Death was coming too soon!
- In addition to that, it appears that, at this point, Hezekiah had no heir.
- Hezekiah’s son Manasseh ascended the throne at age twelve (2 Kings 21:1).
- Which means he was not born until three years *after* this incident.
- No good Hebrew could view being cut off childless in midlife as anything but a most severe judgment from God.

38:2 Hezekiah **turned his face to the wall** and prayed to the LORD,³ “Please, LORD. Remember how I have served you **faithfully and with wholehearted devotion**, and how I have carried out your will.” Then Hezekiah wept bitterly.

- The significance of the fact that Hezekiah “*turned his face to the wall*” is uncertain.
- Possibly it indicated a desire to be alone with his thoughts, uninterrupted by his courtiers or the prophet.
- With ***intense emotion***, Hezekiah implored the LORD to consider his situation and remember how he had conducted himself “*faithfully and with wholehearted devotion*”, as was required of a covenant king.
- The details of Hezekiah’s reforms are not included in Isaiah, but may be found in 2 Kings 18:1-8, and more extensively in 2 Chron 29-31.

38:2 *Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, ³ “Please, LORD. Remember how I have served you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion, and how I have carried out your will.” Then Hezekiah wept bitterly.*

- Hezekiah does not claim to be perfect, but he had been a good king.
- He is not resorting to bargaining with the LORD on the basis of his good works, and indeed he does not directly *ask* for anything.
- The prayer is the groan of a devastated individual expressing his grief that his hopes to achieve much for the LORD are about to be brought to a premature end.

38:4 *The LORD's message came to Isaiah, ⁵ "Go and tell Hezekiah: 'This is what the LORD God of your ancestor David says: "I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Look, I will add 15 years to your life. ⁶ I will also rescue you and this city from the king of Assyria. I will shield this city.'"*

- Hezekiah's prayer received a speedy response.
- After Isaiah had delivered his message and left the king, before he had even finished crossing the middle of the palace courtyard, the LORD spoke to him (2 Kings 20:4).
- And so Isaiah returned to deliver to the king a *reversal* of his previous message.

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- Isaiah does not complain, as Jonah did (Jonah 4:2-3), that the message he had just announced was now being contradicted.
- This incident shows that a special environment was not needed for a prophet to receive divine revelation.
- The LORD's word came to Isaiah as he walked across a busy courtyard.

38:4 *The LORD's message came to Isaiah, ⁵ "Go and tell Hezekiah: 'This is what **the LORD God of your ancestor David** says: "I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Look, I will add 15 years to your life. ⁶ I will also rescue you and this city from the king of Assyria. I will shield this city.'"*

- The prophetic announcement is to be delivered in the name of "*the LORD God of your ancestor David*".
- This is a reminder to Hezekiah that his occupation of the Davidic throne was *ultimately* the result of the promises of the Davidic covenant.
- In it the LORD had solemnly pledged to David, "*Your house and your kingdom will endure for ever before me; your throne will remain secure for ever*" (2 Sam 7:16).
- Hezekiah did not have to worry about the continuation of the Davidic line, but, even so, the LORD graciously responds to the king's request.

38:4 *The LORD's message came to Isaiah, ⁵ "Go and tell Hezekiah: 'This is what the LORD God of your ancestor David says: "I have heard your prayer; I have seen **your tears**. **Look, I will add 15 years to your life.** ⁶ **I will also rescue you and this city from the king of Assyria. I will shield this city.**"'"*

- Although there is a reference here to Hezekiah's "*tears*" prayed with genuine emotion and fervor, that, in itself, was not the basis for what would happen next.
- The first-person verbs here focus attention on the fact that the change of plans were a result of the **LORD's** initiative and intervention: "**Look, I will add 15 years to your life. ⁶ I will also rescue you and this city from the king of Assyria. I will shield this city.**"

38:4 *The LORD's message came to Isaiah, ⁵ "Go and tell Hezekiah: 'This is what the LORD God of your ancestor David says: "I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Look, I will add 15 years to your life. ⁶ I will also rescue you and this city from the king of Assyria. I will shield this city.'"*

- Not only does the LORD sovereignly add fifteen years to Hezekiah's life, he also gives the Davidic monarch a promise of security for himself **and** his capital city during that period.
- The king was not just concerned about **himself**, but he was **also** concerned about the destiny of the nation over which God had placed him.
- Though both would come perilously close to death, they would be delivered by divine intervention (cf. 36:14).
- The LORD will "**shield this city**" – that is, protect it from the enemy (cf. 31:5; 37:35).
- This promise of protection for Hezekiah and his city especially makes sense if it was given **before** the destruction of the Assyrian army.

38:7 *Isaiah replied, “This is your sign from the LORD confirming that the LORD will do what he has said...”*

- The narrative of 2 Kings 20:7-8 gives us further information at this point (also mentioned later in Isaiah 38:21–22) which shows that Hezekiah himself **requested** a sign.
- Unlike his father Ahaz, who **refused** to ask for a sign because he was determined to follow his own plans (7:12), Hezekiah wanted his faith to be increased, and so asked for a sign.
- In the 2 Kings account we see that the LORD gave Hezekiah a measure of choice in the sign that he would perform:
 - *Do you want the shadow to move **ahead** ten steps or to **go back** ten steps?” Hezekiah answered, “It is **easy** for the shadow to **lengthen** ten steps, but **not** for it to **go back** ten steps.” (2 Kings 20:9b-10)*

38:8 *Look, I will make the shadow go back 10 steps on the stairs of Ahaz.” And then the shadow went back 10 steps.*

- The LORD announces that he will display his power by turning back the shadow of the sun.
- It is not clear what sort of object is involved here.
- It may simply have been a stairway on which shadows fell, which gave a rough indication of the passage of time.
- However, mention of “*the stairs of Ahaz*” suggests that it was a specially constructed artefact, probably derived from Mesopotamia (cf. the copy made of the altar in Damascus, 2 Kings 16:10-11).
- If it is permissible to translate “*steps*” as “degrees”, the object involved might be relatively small, similar to a modern sundial, with a pointer to cast a shadow.
- Either way, the LORD was going to use this device to prove his control over the passage of time in the created realm.

38:8 *Look, I will make the shadow go **back 10 steps** on the stairs of Ahaz.” And then **the shadow went back 10 steps**.*

- Given the uncertainty that exists about the nature of the device involved, it is not possible to establish how long a period of time was involved in the shadow’s moving “*back 10 steps*”, but it might have been equivalent to two to three hours.
- What occurred, then, when “*the shadow went back 10 steps*”?
- Though a miracle was involved (cf. 2 Chr. 32:31), the means by which it was effected is not stated.
- The text does not say that the relative orientation of the sun and earth were reversed
- Many have supposed that some phenomenon involving refraction of light from the sun was involved (cf. similar explanations to account for Josh 10:12–14).

38:8 *Look, I will make the shadow go back 10 steps on the stairs of Ahaz.” And then the shadow went back 10 steps.*

- What we *can* be certain of is that what took place here was *outside* the ordinary providential working of God in this world.
- It was directly caused by God to provide irrefutable proof of his power to accomplish the pledges he had made in connection with this sign – namely:
 - The recovery and extended life of Hezekiah,
 - The protection of Jerusalem
 - The fulfilment of all the promises of the covenant made with David.

Next Time

I plan to look at “Hezekiah’s Psalm” in **Isaiah 38:9-20** and the Description of Hezekiah’s Healing in **Isaiah 38:21-22**

Class Discussion Time



Class Discussion Time

- Unlike Hezekiah's previous prayer for deliverance from an overwhelming foreign military threat, Hezekiah's prayer for healing from a serious (perhaps fatal) disease is something that all of us have probably done at one time or another.
- Would anyone here be willing to share with the class an account of where you prayed for healing in a situation that looked utterly hopeless, and the Lord healed the person you were praying for in a spectacular and unexpected way?

Class Discussion Time

- It would be tempting for some to get the **wrong** idea from this text: that any time someone we care about becomes sick, all we have to do is pray (preferably with tears) and God will heal the person for whom we are praying. Name it and claim it!
- And yet we must remember that there are **other** examples in the scriptures where God did **not** heal a person for whom fervent prayers were being offered:
 - *The Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and the child became very ill. Then David prayed to God for the child and fasted. He would even go and spend the night lying on the ground. The elders of his house stood over him and tried to lift him from the ground, but he was unwilling, and refused to eat food with them. On the seventh day the child died.* (2 Sam 12:15b-18a)
- Have you ever prayed for a sick person for whom you cared very deeply and they died anyway?
- What are we to make of a situation like that? Why **doesn't** God always grant our request when we ask him to heal someone?
- Does this mean that there is **no point** in praying for those who are sick, since there is no guarantee that God will heal them?