

ISAIAH LESSON 33

And There are No Kings Inside the Gates of Eden^a
(Isaiah 38:1-39:8)

Isaiah 38:1-39:8 Revised Standard Version (RSV)

Hezekiah's Illness

38 In those days Hezeki'ah 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^b: Set your house in order; for you shall die, you shall not recover."^c ² Then Hezeki'ah turned his face to the wall, and prayed to the Lord,^d ³ and said, "Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in thy sight." And Hezeki'ah wept bitterly.^e ⁴ Then the word of the Lord came to Isaiah:^f ⁵ "Go and say to Hezeki'ah, Thus says the Lord, the God^g of David your father: I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will add fifteen years to your life.^h ⁶ I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and defend this city.ⁱ

⁷ "This is the sign to you from the Lord, that the Lord will do this thing that he has promised:^j ⁸ 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.^k

⁹ A writing of Hezeki'ah king of Judah, after he had been sick and had recovered from his sickness:^l

¹⁰ I said, In the noontide of my days

I must depart;

I am consigned to the gates of Sheol

for the rest of my years.^m

¹¹ I said, I shall not see the Lordⁿ

in the land of the living;

I shall look upon man no more

among the inhabitants of the world.^o

¹² 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 thou dost bring me to an end;^p

¹³ I cry for help until morning;

like a lion he breaks all my bones;

from day to night thou dost bring me to an end.^q

¹⁴ Like a swallow or a crane I clamor,

I moan like a dove.

My eyes are weary with looking upward.

O Lord^r, I am oppressed; be thou my security!^s

¹⁵ But what can I say? For he has spoken to me,

and he himself has done it.

All my sleep has fled

because of the bitterness of my soul.^t

¹⁶ 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!^u

¹⁷ Lo, it was for my welfare

that I had great bitterness;
but thou hast held back my life
from the pit of destruction,
for thou hast cast all my sins
behind thy back.^v

¹⁸ For Sheol cannot thank thee,
death cannot praise thee;
those who go down to the pit cannot hope
for thy faithfulness.^w

¹⁹ The living, the living, he thanks thee,
as I do this day;
the father makes known to the children
thy faithfulness.^x

²⁰ The Lord will save me,
and we will sing to stringed instruments
all the days of our life,
at the house of the Lord.^y

²¹ Now Isaiah had said, “Let them take a cake of figs, and apply it to the boil, that he may recover.”^z ²² Hezeki’ah also had said, “What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord?”^{aa}

Envoys from Babylon Welcomed

38 At that time Mero’dach-bal’adan the son of Bal’adan, king of Babylon, sent envoys with letters and a present to Hezeki’ah, for he heard that he had been sick and had recovered.^{bb} ² And Hezeki’ah welcomed them; and he showed them his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his whole armory, all that was found in his storehouses. There was nothing in his house or in all his realm that Hezeki’ah did not show them.^{cc} ³ Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezeki’ah, and said to him, “What did these men say? And whence did they come to you?” Hezeki’ah said, “They have come to me from a far country, from Babylon.”^{dd} ⁴ He said, “What have they seen in your house?” Hezeki’ah answered, “They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing in my storehouses that I did not show them.”^{ee}

⁵ Then Isaiah said to Hezeki’ah, “Hear the word of the Lord of hosts^{ff,gg} ⁶ Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left, says the Lord.^{hh} ⁷ And some of your own sons, who are born to you, shall be taken away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.”ⁱⁱ ⁸ Then said Hezeki’ah to Isaiah, “The word of the Lord which you have spoken is good.” For he thought, “There will be peace and security in my days.”^{jj}

Revised Standard Version (RSV)

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1. In Is 38:1 God tells Hezekiah that he will surely die, and that he should put his house in order. Does this warning apply to us, and if so, how?

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^a The most important historical event of Isaiah’s ministry was the siege of Jerusalem by King Sennacherib of Assyria in 701 B.C. and is subsequent salvation by God upon the repentance of King Hezekiah of Judah. These events form the backdrop, and largely

the subject, of Chapters 1-35 of Isaiah. Chapters 36-39 of Isaiah are very similar to portions of the annals of King Hezekiah (2Ki 16:20, 18:1-20:21; 2Ch 28:27-32:33). **Chapters 36 and 37** describe the siege by and defeat of Sennacherib and are almost identical to 2Ki 18:13, 18:17-19:37 and similar to 2Ch 32:1-23. **Chapters 38 and 39** describe events that precede those of Chapters 36 and 37 (based on the known date of Hezekiah's death and the promise of God to give him 15 more years of life) including Hezekiah's serious illness (Is 38:1), his recovery through God's intervention (Is 38:2-5, 38:20-21), the promise that God will save Jerusalem from Assyria (Is 38:6-8), and the foolish decision of Hezekiah to show Babylonian envoys all the secrets of Jerusalem (Is 39:1-8). In a sense these chapters form a bridge between the first half of the book which deals with Assyria and the second half which focuses on the Babylonian exile which Isaiah is predicting. The text of these chapters is very close to that of 2Ki 20:1-19 except that Hezekiah's prayer of thanksgiving (Is 38:15-20) is omitted. The events of these four chapters are also recounted in different words in 2Ch 28:27-32:33. Many of these events, from different perspectives, are recorded in the annals and monuments of the Assyrian kings, and in the writings of Herodotus, a Greek historian of the Fifth Century B.C., Berosus, a Hellenistic Babylonian historian of the Third Century B.C, and Josephus, a Jewish Roman historian of the First Century A.D. Jhan Moskowitz, a great lover of 60's and 70's rock music, took the title of this lesson, *And There Are No Kings Inside the Gates of Eden*, from the Bob Dylan poem, *Gates of Eden*, <https://bobdylan.com/songs/gates-eden/>.

^b **Lord - Yahweh**, or *Jehovah* (יהוה, YHWH), see Note in the Introduction to this Study. YHWH appears here and in verses 38:2, 38:3, 38:4, 38:7, 38:20 (twice), 38:22, 39:6 and 39:8.

^c **38:1** 2Ki 20:1; 2Ch32:24. Hezekiah became seriously ill (חֻלָּה מוֹת, *chalah muth*, lit. sick to the point of death; Jn 11:1-5; Ac 9:37; Php 2:27-30), with no rational hope for recovery given the medical technology available at the time. God sent Isaiah to the King with a word from God that he should put his house in order (2Sm 17:23; Ec 9:10) for he would soon die (Jnh 3:4). Isaiah conveyed God's message that Hezekiah's death was inevitable (Gn 3:3-4; 2Sm 12:22) and that recovery from his sickness was not to be expected. Yet the warning also gave Hezekiah the opportunity, or perhaps motivation, to pray to God for his own recovery (Jnh 3:10). Perhaps God, in light of Hezekiah's past efforts to destroy idol worship, wanted to encourage Hezekiah to repent, turn to the Lord and pray for healing. In a sense, Hezekiah was being tested to find out if he was ready for the next test. He was also being instructed by God on the efficacy of prayer in the hope that the lesson will be remembered. We all are destined to die a physical death, and the injunction to Hezekiah to put his house in order is also for us, though in our case the injunction is to get right with God (Jr 18:7-10). Perhaps in a double meaning, Hezekiah is being told to get right with God and, when he does, he is given additional years of life and promised that the Assyrians will not capture Jerusalem. There are many indications that the events of Chapters 38 and 39 happened before the events of Chapters 36 and 37. In addition to the fact that Assyria's invasion of Judah in 701 B.C. was less than 15 years prior to Hezekiah's death, the account in 2Ch 32:24-26 indicates that his illness occurred prior to the Assyrian invasion, and prior to the events of Chapters 36 and 37, and that Hezekiah's humbling himself led to God's promise that Assyria would not succeed (Is 38:6, 2Ki 20:6). Also, the Babylonian King mentioned in Chapter 39, Mero'dach-bal'adan the son of Bal'adan, was last King in 702 B.C. before being defeated by Sennacherib for the last time.

^d **38:2** 2Ki 20:2. In response to his own illness, and to God's warning, Hezekiah turned (physically not metaphorically) and **prayed to God** (Ps 50:15, 91:51), perhaps facing against the wall (1Ki 21:4; Mt 6:6) which faced the Temple (1Ki 8:30).

^e 38:3 2Ki 20:3. Hezekiah's prayer begins by reminding God of Hezekiah's faithfulness, whole (שָׁלֵם, *shalem*, lit. complete) heart and walking (Gn 5:22-23; Jb 23:11-12; 2Ch 31:20-21) in the ways that God has commanded (lit. done what is good in [God's] eyes; Dt 6:18; Ps 6:6, 26:3), in his case by leading a revival in Judah (2Ki 18:5-6; 1Ch 28:9, 29:19; Ps 18:20-27; Neh 13:14; Heb 6:10). The Lord had promised that as long as the Kings of Judah followed God, the Davidic dynasty would remain on the throne of Judah (1Ki 2:4). He then weeps bitterly (lit. "great weeping; Ps 6:6-8) in light of his fatal diagnosis. Gn 17:1; Dt 6:18, 10:20; 1Ki 2:4, 3:6, 8:23, 8:61; 2Ki 18:4-6; 1Ch 28:9, 29:19; Neh 13:14; Ps 6:6-8, 26:3;

^f 38:4 2Ki 20:4. Lit. Then the word; 1Sa 13:13; Isa 39:5

^g **God - Elohim** (אֱלֹהִים), used here in combination with **Lord, Yahweh**, or *Jehovah* (יהוה, YHWH), see note in Introduction to this study.

^h 38:5 2Ki 20:5-6. Lit days ; 15 years calculated as in 2Ki 18:2, 18:13; 1QIsaa LXX; the Heb. lacks and; Hezekiah, like Moses (Ex 32:7-14) and Jonah (Jnh 4:2) before him, that God will listen to the prayers of the faithful. 2Ki 18:2-3, 18:13; Ps 6:6;

ⁱ 38:6 2Ki 20:6. Lit. the hand of the; 1QIsaa; MT LXX lack for my own sake and for my servant David's sake; Is 31:5, 37:35;

^j 38:7 Is 7:11, 7:14, 20:3, 37:30; Gn 14:14; Jdg 6:17-21, 6:36-40; 2Ki 20:9-10; 2Ch 32:31;

^k 38:8 2Ki 20:9-11. 1QIsaa; the Heb. lacks upper; The meaning of the Hebrew verse is uncertain. The stairway of Ahaz is a westward facing flight of stairs on which the sun would cast a shadow that would move up the stairs as the sun moved toward sunset. Isaiah promises that, as a sign to Hezekiah, the shadow would move backward as if the sun had reversed itself in the sky

for a time. Archeologists have found one of Hezekiah's official seals, or bulla, commemorating this event, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/03/middleeast/king-hezekiah-royal-seal/index.html>. Jsh 10:12-14; 2Ki 20:9-11;

^l 38:9 Lit he lived after his illness; Ps 116

^m 38:10 Lit. gates; i.e. the place where legal cases were adjudicated; I.e. the realm of the afterlife; Lit days; 1QIsaa; MT LXX read the rest of; Or In the quiet; Jb 17:11-13, 17:16; Ps 102:24-25, 107:18; 2Co 1:9;

ⁿ Yah - Lit. Yah; So 1QIsaa; MT reads Yah Yah; MTmss read Lord

^o 38:11 1QIsaa; the Heb. lacks and; Lit. cessation; or the end; So 1QIsaa MT; MTmss read the world; Is 12:2; Jb 28:13; Ps 27:13, 38:10, 88:5, 116:9;

^p 38:12 1QIsaa; 1QIsab MT read and has been taken away; 1QIsaa; MT reads have rolled up; When a weaver has completed a bolt of cloth it is “**rolled up**” for storage and sale. Is 33:20, 34:4; Nu 11:15; Jb 4:20-21, 6:9, 7:6; Ps 31:22, 32:4, 73:14, 90:5-6; Wis 9:15-20; 2Co 5:1-4; Heb 1:12; 2Pt 1:13-14;

^q 38:13 1QIsaa; or I cried for help; MT reads I was composed; cf. Targ; Or (with Targum) I cried for help; Jb 9:17, 10:16, 23:14; Ps 30:5, 32:4, 37:7, 38:3, 51:8; Jr 34:17; La 3:4; Dn 6:24;

^r **Lord** - *Adonai* (אֲדֹנָי), see note on the Names of God in the introduction. Appears here and in verse 16.

^s 38:14 1QIsaa MT; 1QIsab reads Lord; 1QIsaa; the Heb. lacks so; Is 59:11; Gn 8:8, 50:24; Jb 17:3, 30:29; Ps 6:7, 69:3, 86:17, 102:6, 119:122-123, 121:1; Jr 8:7; Ezk 7:16; Nah 2:7; Heb 7:22;

^t 38:15 1QIsaa; MT reads for he has spoken to me; 1QIsaa; MT reads and it is he who has done it; Targum and DSS read And what shall I say for He; The Hebrew of 15-16 is difficult. Is 38:17; 1Sm 1:10; 2Sm 7:20; 1Ki 21:27; Jb 3:20, 7:11, 10:1; Ps 39:9; Ezk 27:31;

^u 38:16 1QIsaa; MT reads is the life of my spirit; Lit You will; Dt 8:3; Ps 39:13, 103:3-4, 119:25, 119:71-75; Heb 12:9;

^v 38:17 1QIsaa; 1QIsab MT read bitter, bitter; 1QIsaa; cf. LXX; MT reads you have loved; I.e. the realm of punishment in the afterlife; 1QIsaa; MT reads pit of destruction; Shalom? Hezekiah recognizes the deliverance from death that comes from forgiveness of sin. Behind your back you cast all my sins: figurative language to express the divine forgiveness of sins, as if God no longer saw or cared about them. Is 43:25; Jb 7:11, 17:16, 33:18, 33:30; Ps 30:3, 32:1-2, 86:13, 103:3-4, 103:12, 106:23, 119:67, 119:71-75; Jr 31:34; Jnh 2:6; Ezk 20:17; Mi 7:18-19; Rm 8:28; Heb 12:11

^w 38:18 I.e. the realm of the afterlife 1QIsaa LXX; implied in 1QIsab MT; 1QIsaa; the Heb. lacks and; I.e. the realm of punishment in the afterlife; Sheol here is the equivalent of death because the dead are cut off from the living and cannot praise God. However we know that whoever dies in the Lord will be with the Lord praising Him (Rm 14:8; 1Co 15; 1Th 5:10). Nu 16:30-33; Ec 9:10; Jb 10:21-22; Ps 6:5-6, 28:1, 30:9, 88:10-13, 115:17; Sir 17:27; Bar 2:17;

^x 38:19 Longer life brings with it a longer time to raise up children in wisdom and the ways of the Lord (Pr 1:8). Dt 4:9, 6:7, 11:19; Ps 78:3-7, 118:17; 119:175;

^y 38:20 At this point a later scribe inserted into 1QIsaa a repetition of v. 19 and the beginning of v. 20, but with some different spellings and a word missing; The same second scribe continued with the rest of this verse; not originally in 1QIsaa. 2Ki 20:5; Ps 23:6, 33:1-3, 45:8, 63:4, 68:24-26, 104:33, 116:2, 116:17-19, 146:2;

^z 38:21 2Ki 20:7. MT; LXX reads Take; 1QIsaa lacks Let them prepare ; Verses 21 and 22 should probably be placed after verse 6 to communicate the order of the account more clearly in English. According to most scholars, if these verses were originally in Isaiah 38, they most likely ended up being misplaced. See 2Ki 20:6-9 for the likely proper placement of these verses in the narrative. Figs were believed to have curative powers.

^{aa} 38:22 2Ki 20:8. 1QIsab MT LXX; 1QIsaa lacks vs. 21-22; a later, third scribe, includes vs. 21-22; 2Ch 32:31

^{bb} 39:1 2Ki 20:12; 2Ch 32:31. 1QIsaa 1QIsab MT; 4QIsab LXX read because; 1QIsaa; 1QIsab MT read had recovered;

^{cc} 39:2 2Ki 20:13. 1QIsaa MTmss; the Heb. lacks in; 1QIsaa; MT LXX read treasure-house; MTqere reads his treasure-house; 1QIsaa; MT reads realm; LXX lacks kingdom; Lit rejoiced over them; ?This likely occurred in 712 B.C. when the King of

Babylon, then a vassal state of Assyria, sought an alliance with Judah to rebel against Assyria. Two years later, in 710, Sargon of Assyria captured a rebellious Babylon.⁷ Marduk-baladan or Marduk-apaliddina ruled Babylon from 721-710 B.C. and again in around 703 B.C. when he led a revolt against Assyria in which Judah and, more passively, Egypt, joined. The rebellion was crushed by Sennacherib and Marduk-apaliddina was driven into exile where he continued to plot rebellion. Hezekiah died in 687 B.C. meaning the events of Chapter 38 occurred around 702 B.C. Thus, within the uncertainties of the chronologies of that time, it is likely that Hezekiah's illness occurred immediately before Babylon's embassy to Judah, and Hezekiah's rebellion against Sennacherib. Sennacherib first crushed Babylon and then turned to Judah the following year. 2Ki 18:15-16; 2Ch 32:25, 32:31; Job 31:25;

^{dd} 39:3 2Ki 20:14. Lit what is good in your eyes (judges); Dt 28:49; 2Sm 12:1; 2Ch 16:7; Jr 5:15

^{ee} 39:4 2Ki 20:15. Lit. said;

^{ff} **Lord of Hosts - Yahweh Tsebaoth** (יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת), combines the Tetragrammaton (יהוה, YHWH) with the Hebrew for army or host.

^{gg} 39:5 2Ki 20:16. Lit. word; Is 28:14; 1Sm 13:13-14, 15:16; Zec 7:4, 8:1, 8:18

^{hh} 39:6 2Ki 20:17. 1QIsaa (pl.); cf. LXX; 1QIsab MT (sing.); 1QIsaa LXX; the Heb. lacks and; Because Judah preferred to follow a pro-Babylonian policy, instead of trusting in the Lord, it would later be exiled to Babylon. This prophecy was fulfilled in the days of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (Dn 1:2, 5:3, 5:23) thus forming a link with the prophecies of the second half of Isaiah. Jdg 6:4; 2Ki 24:13, 25:13-17; Jr 20:5

ⁱⁱ 39:7 2Ki 20:18. 1QIsaa; 4QIsab MT read from you; The Kingdom of Judah lasted for another 125 more years until it was finally conquered and its inhabitants carried off into exile in Babylon (). Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, was noted for his cruelty and sin and is cited as a cause of Judah's downfall (2Ki 21:10-16). All but one of the Kings who followed Hezekiah were evil with the only exception being Josiah (). Sons here should be read as a synonym for descendants rather than being limited to one generation. The reference to eunuchs here is likely to the possibility that the Davidic line would end forever, though through God's mercy and divine plan, the Messiah Himself was of the line of David (Is 9:6-7; ____). 2Ki 24:10-16; 2Ki 25; 2Ch 36:10; Dn 1:1-19;

^{jj} 39:8 2Ki 20:19. Shalom? Lit. said; Jdg 10:15; 2Ch 32:26, 34:26-28; Jb 1:21; Ps 39:9;