

Isaiah 38,39

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In 38:1, the Book of Isaiah comes to a major turning point. Statements about Assyria are finished. God had delivered Jerusalem after terrible loss in the rest of the country (1:7). The Lord showed them that only he could deliver, a lesson they needed to learn and a lesson that would be developed in the rest of Isaiah ever further. The context would change. The great enemy would no longer be Assyria. In the Exodus, God had delivered from Egypt. 700 years later Samaria was overrun by Assyria, but Jerusalem was spared. The next crisis would be the Babylonian captivity. After that only those who believed God's promises had any hope that the Jews would not be wiped out. In later chapters Isaiah will move beyond that power of Babylon to how we may be delivered from our sins. The return from Babylon will overshadow the Exodus. The deliverance from sin by the death and resurrection of the Messiah would outrank even the return from Babylon. Jesus will bring an eternal peace, a salvation of the world itself. First one must hear the Word of God concerning his deliverance from Babylon, because by it the Lord showed his powerful arm in salvation.

Isaiah 38 tells of Hezekiah's sickness and Isaiah 39 tells of the delegation from Babylon. Some agreement was made with the Babylonians, another example of God's people diverting their faith from God's promises to alliances with faithless men. The Babylonian onslaught would be different; God would not deliver Jerusalem from their hands. They would carry God's people into captivity. Since Isaiah was not a prophet during the time of Babylon's invasion in Judah, he does not speak of it as a current threat. Jeremiah and Ezekiel did. In chapter 39 it was simply a future certainty that they would defeat Jerusalem. After chapter 40 God's message is of the return from Babylon. In the case of Assyria, the Lord kept Jerusalem from the lion's mouth, but with Babylon he took them out of the lion's stomach!

Hezekiah's sickness and recovery were known as far away as Babylon. This was an occasion for Merodach-Baladan to send his greetings and at the same time encourage Hezekiah to cooperate with him against Assyria their common foe. Just as Hezekiah's father Ahaz trusted Assyria (Isaiah 7) and his children suffered for it, Hezekiah would make the same blunder, and a later generation would be crushed by the world's strongest nation. Isaiah 13 & 14 were about Babylon, a nation destined to surpass Assyria, a nation also destined to be crushed by the Lord.

The chronology of Isaiah 36-39 Merodach Baladan died in 702 BC, so the visit to Hezekiah may have been in early 702 BC. The attempt by Sennacherib to take Jerusalem was 701 BC. Thus the events of Isaiah 38, 39 definitely precede 36,37! In 38:6 it says, *"I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria."* That is obviously not something God promised after he had already done it. In chapters 36 & 37 Isaiah finished reporting events related to Assyria. He found it appropriate to save events related to Babylon for the next section of his book.

38:1-8 The illness *"You are going to die"* is a way to indicate a terminal illness. The Lord later relieved Hezekiah of the grip death had on him. Hezekiah's prayer shows interest in himself, and 39:8 does so in an even worse way. In light of the earlier alliances with Egypt, Hezekiah's claim to wholehearted devotion (v.3) is an exaggeration, if in fact he was king at the time. When the Word of the Lord came to him (v.5) the Lord did not indicate agreement that Hezekiah's faithfulness was a factor in God extending his life. One of the best features of his prayer is that in a time of trust in so many wrong directions, Hezekiah prayed to the Lord.

God's gracious promise was not merely about extending his life but included saving the city. God gave much more than Hezekiah prayed for. The Lord announced the city also would be spared from Assyria. This promise made while Hezekiah was on his death bed. Only later did the Babylonian envoys arrive. That means that his forming an alliance with them was a greater sin in the eyes of the Lord who had delivered him from his deathbed and promised to do so for Jerusalem. God granted longer life and promised more than Hezekiah prayed for – deliverance of the city – yet the vacillating king still accepted the overture of a heathen nation.

In Isaiah 7 God had offered Ahaz a sign, but he rejected God's offer! Hezekiah asked (v.21) and was granted a sign that occurred on the stairway named after his unbelieving father Ahaz. The sun's shadow reversed on the steps. If the Lord can move the sun and earth at will, surely he can defend Jerusalem. Back in chapter 7, Ahaz could have asked for such a sign! Such a supernatural event should show Hezekiah he had no need to rely on Babylon. The later distress, rebuke and disgrace (37:3) would bring him to abject reliance on God. When he was still shaken by being so near death, he promised to walk humbly (v.15). The Lord's people are weak; we sin

easily, but eventually we find we can pray very honestly when we say, “*All that we have accomplished, you have done for us*” (26:12).

Hezekiah’s reflections, 38:9-20

38:12-14 After he was well, the sobered king reflected on his ordeal. It had made him pray. Trouble is good if it makes us pray. (Our real God is the One we actually pray to.)

Death would mean lost contact with the living who remain and the privilege of worshipping with them. His life would end like a tent being taken down, like a weaver cutting the finished product off the loom, like a lion crushing his bones. His moaning prayers sounded like birds. In all this, Hezekiah was conscious that it was God who had brought him to the point of death, knowing the hand of God was against him because of his sins (v.17).

38:15-17 This very sick man was promised life and received it gratefully. He was aware God had restored life (v.16), even though he received medical treatment on the orders of God’s prophet (v.21). God had spoken and God had acted (v.15). Hezekiah’s experience is a lesson for all, for by such things as God’s words and acts, men live. The Lord who was taking his life (vv.12,13) was the Lord who restored it. As it was with the king, so it would be with the city. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, but in the case of Hezekiah and Jerusalem, the Lord was taking away and then giving back. He also gave a spiritual benefit with the chastening, a truth understood better by believers experiencing trouble than by those merely observing from outside.

38:17 Hezekiah’s words anticipate later themes. Salvation is motivated by the love of God. Salvation is a rescue from destruction that can only happen if our sins are put behind God’s back. But that can only happen if God has been satisfied concerning our sin. In later chapters, Isaiah will focus on how sins are removed by Christ. Sins are never just forgiven; there must be an atonement to remove them. We can never be saved from sin by what we do with them but only by what God does. Salvation is of the Lord.

38:18-20 Here Hezekiah speaks of what it would be like to die without sins forgiven: he would not sing God’s praise but live under his wrath. However, God had brought him to repentance, giving him life, song, and a purpose to serve the next generation. “The Lord will save me” is the simplicity of faith. Hezekiah’s testimony to the saving grace of God

ends with a corporate “we will sing”. He moves away from his individual experience to an obedient exercise of the Lord’s corporate worship in his temple. True worship does not occur in one’s individual way; it follows in the path laid out for us by the Lord, with God himself the center of all his redeemed people.

38:21 This text is clear that it was the Lord who heard Hezekiah’s prayer and promised him healing, yet God’s prophet ordered medical treatment. The Lord may work with or without means, with or without medicine.

Isaiah 39:1-8 By showing his storehouses, Hezekiah showed his strength, a strength soon to be worthless! (See 22:8). His action indicated a commitment to work with the Babylonians who would later devour Jerusalem. Isaiah confronts the king (v.3), a role a prophet has under the authority of the King over all kings (Matthew 14:3-5).

Hezekiah showed all and would lose all. Removal of God’s people and their valuables to Babylon is certain. Hezekiah’s descendants would become eunuchs! – how shall the line of David survive? God would preserve the line and keep his covenant with David. Through the Son of David to come, He will bring salvation to all nations (55:3-5). Jerusalem would travel to Babylon, but it is Babylon that would sink to rise no more (Jeremiah 51:64). To the New Jerusalem and to the Lord who lives there, nations will travel with joy to learn his holy ways (2:1-4).

Will We Ever Learn? When the threat was Aram and Israel, the king in Jerusalem trusted Assyria (chapter 7). When Assyria was the danger, they trusted Egypt (chapters 28-31). And now in chapter 39 an alliance was formed with Babylon, the nation which would later destroy their city and carry off any leaders Babylon chose not to kill.

Isaiah deliberately saved this conversation with Hezekiah for this position in his written prophecy. In chapters 40 – 48 to follow, the oppressor is Babylon, and the message is of God’s deliverance from that Gentile monster.