

The Hapless Healing of Hezekiah

Text
Isaiah 38-39

Topic
Hezekiah is healed and granted an additional fifteen years to live, leading to the birth of wicked Manasseh, who is carried off captive to Assyria

Title
***“And When I Die, and When I’m Dead,
Dead and Gone, There’ll Be One Child Born
to Be Carried Off”***

Historians call it, “History’s favorite guessing game.” They ask the question, “What if JFK had lived?”

What would the world have been like if JFK had not been killed? What if he had lived a long life, had served a second term, and led America through the heart of the turbulent 1960’s?

One historian reviewed the theories, saying,

If we are to believe these speculative alternate histories, the dominos from his assassination careen in every which way. In some of these visions, a world with John Kennedy is a world without hippies; with a peaceful US-Cuba relationship, with less war (or more war); or a world with an aging, divorced, wheelchair-bound elder statesman with all his flaws exposed. Either that, or a nuclear holocaust. *Who really knows?*

There is an amazing true account in the Old Testament of a king who **did** live after he was supposed to die. In his case, we can see *exactly* how it affected him and his nation.

I’m talking, of course, about King Hezekiah of Judah The barebones outline of the story are these:

- The Lord sent the prophet Isaiah to tell Hezekiah that he was going to die from the sickness he had contracted.
- From his deathbed, Hezekiah fervently prayed for healing.
- God heard his prayer, and sent Isaiah back to tell Hezekiah he would recover, and live an additional fifteen years.

Not only is it a must devotional read for anyone who is ill, but there are deep theological truths to be pondered. Divine healing is one (obviously). But we also see effective prayer... God's sovereignty working with man's free will... God's foreknowledge and foreordination... And God's providence. There is a miracle thrown in, too, just for good measure.

Hezekiah's healing and its results are told in a couple of places. We're going to look at the account as remembered and recorded by the prophet who was involved - Isaiah. It's in chapters thirty-eight and thirty-nine of his book.

I'll organize my comments around two points: #1 You Rejoice With Hezekiah In The Healing, and #2 You Rethink With Isaiah About The Healing.

#1 You Rejoice With Hezekiah In The Healing (Chapter 38)

A little backstory is always helpful. Hezekiah reigned twenty-nine years, from 726-697BC. He is remembered as a great and good king.

He set about to abolish idolatry from his kingdom, and among other things, he destroyed the "brazen serpent" from Israel's Exodus from Egypt. It had been set up in Jerusalem, and had become an object of idolatrous worship.

During his reign, the kingdom of Judah was in subjection to the powerful Assyrian Empire. On the death of Sargon and the accession of his son Sennacherib to the throne of Assyria, Hezekiah refused to pay tribute, and "rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not." He entered into an alliance with Egypt against Assyria. Bad idea. This led to the invasion of Judah by Sennacherib, who took forty cities, and besieged Jerusalem. Hezekiah yielded to the demands of the Assyrian king, and agreed to pay him tribute.

Sennacherib came a second time and besieged Jerusalem. Hezekiah prayed to God, and “that night the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians 185,000 men.” The remaining Assyrians left, defeated.

That should be enough for us to get into our text without too many questions.

Isa 38:1 In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, "Thus says the LORD: 'Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.' "

“In those days” is just *before* the second siege of Jerusalem. Hezekiah “was sick and near death” at what seemed the worst possible time for the nation. Besides that, he was only about 39 years old - a young man for that time.

“Why me?” “Why now?” Those questions are inevitable if you get sick, and especially if the illness is life-threatening.

I don't know if you've realized it yet, but we live in a world overflowing in loss and suffering and death. It causes people to rail against God, asking why He seems either *unwilling* or *unable* to help us. I'm convinced this is the biggest stumbling block people have about God.

BTW - Scholars call the study of these questions *theodicy*, meaning, “the attempt to answer the question of why a good God permits the manifestation of evil, thus resolving the issue of the problem of evil.”

How do we respond? What is our theodicy?

1. God created our parents, Adam and Eve, in His own image, meaning they had genuine free will to obey or to disobey Him.
2. They chose to disobey God, bringing upon their descendants the consequence God had warned them about: Death, and all the suffering and loss that goes with it.
3. God promised to come as a man into the world mankind ruined to undo the damage by taking our place in death. Jesus was that God-man, and He has made a way for mankind to be redeemed and regenerated; and for creation to be restored.
4. The Bible tells that story, from inglorious beginning to glorious end.

God *has* done something - something costly and wonderful. The only valid question to ask is, “What is God waiting for?” The apostle Peter answers it, “The Lord... is

longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (Second Peter 3:9). He is waiting for more people to hear the Gospel, and to be saved and spared from eternal conscious torment in the Lake of Fire.

The Lord sent Isaiah to Hezekiah to tell him that he was going to die from his illness. This was his deathbed. Hezekiah did what we would do: He prayed.

Isa 38:2 Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the LORD,

Isa 38:3 and said, "Remember now, O LORD, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done *what is* good in Your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

We'll see more of his prayer in a moment. We immediately think Hezekiah ought not to remind the Lord how deserving he is of healing. However, he was praying under the Old Covenant. God *did* promise reward, and even long life, for faithful obedience. Everything Hezekiah said of himself was true. It was a good Old Testament prayer.

Hezekiah's prayer is *not* a good model for us. In the church age in which we live, we don't list out our good works, and expect material and physical blessing instead of buffeting.

God's Old Covenant saints knew there was life after death, but had little information. There is no place in Hezekiah's Bible that described where he was going. Drop down to verse nine and you'll see what I mean:

Isa 38:9 This is the writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick and had recovered from his sickness:

Isa 38:10 I said, "In the prime of my life I shall go to the gates of Sheol; I am deprived of the remainder of my years."

Isa 38:11 I said, "I shall not see YAH, The LORD in the land of the living; I shall observe man no more among the inhabitants of the world.

Isa 38:12 My life span is gone, Taken from me like a shepherd's tent; I have cut off my life like a weaver. He cuts me off from the loom; From day until night You make an end of me.

Isa 38:13 I have considered until morning - Like a lion, So He breaks all my bones; From day until night You make an end of me.

Isa 38:14 Like a crane or a swallow, so I chattered; I mourned like a dove; My eyes fail *from looking* upward. O LORD, I am oppressed; Undertake for me!

This is how the godly regarded death under the Old Covenant. Their revelation of the afterlife was limited. Not so us.

We have the full revelation of life after death. For the believer in Christ, to be absent from the body, in death, is to be immediately present with the Lord in Heaven. Some of us won't die at all. Jesus is coming for His church, and when He does, those of us who are alive will be raptured.

While I would never suggest you not weep, you need not weep bitterly. Our attitude toward death ought to be framed by these words of the apostle Paul: "For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain. But if *I* live on in the flesh, this *will mean* fruit from *my* labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is* far better" (Philippians 1:21-23).
Isa 38:4 And the word of the LORD came to Isaiah, saying,
Isa 38:5 "Go and tell Hezekiah, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will add to your days fifteen years."

God told Hezekiah he was going to die. Not just eventually, but from *this* illness, and soon. Now He tells him he's *not* going to die; he'll have fifteen more years to live.

We get an incredible insight into the doctrines of God's *foreknowledge* and His *foreordination*:

- God's foreknowledge is defined as "God's knowledge of the entire course of events which are future from the human point of view."
- God's foreordination is defined as "being determined in advance; especially the doctrine (usually associated with Calvinism) that God has foreordained every event throughout eternity (including the final salvation of mankind).

Some argue that God's foreknowledge is not simply His knowing beforehand what is going to happen. They say that it actively foreordains - it determines - everything in advance. He knows what is going to happen because He has determined it will happen.

That's clearly not true in this case. God foreknew Hezekiah's imminent death, but responding to prayer, He foreknew a different time of death. God remained sovereign; Hezekiah exercised free will.

In this case (and there are others) God's foreknowledge did not determine the outcome.

Hey, if everything is predetermined, *why pray at all?*

God answered Hezekiah's prayer for healing. We know He can still do that. So why is it that, if we're being honest, the vast majority of the time we are **not** healed when we pray for it?

As wonderful as the New Covenant is... Under it we are called upon to suffer to show the world the grace of God at work:

- Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).
- The apostle Paul said, "Now I have joy in my pain because of you, and in my flesh I undergo whatever is still needed to make the sorrows of Christ complete, for the salvation of his body, the church" (Colossians 1:24 BBE). Albert Barnes explains this, saying, "[Paul] felt that it was an object to be earnestly desired to be made in all respects just like Christ, and that in his present circumstances he was fast filling up that which was lacking, so that he would have a more complete resemblance to Him."

You *can* be healed in response to prayer; more likely, God is going to tell you what He told the apostle Paul when he prayed for healing: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (Second Corinthians 12:9).

For our part, we can respond as Paul did: "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."

Isa 38:6 I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city."

He was referring to the second siege, in which the angel fought for them. Earlier Hezekiah had sought help from Egypt. This time his help would come from the Lord. Reliance, not alliance... Kudos to Hezekiah for modeling this important principle.

Isa 38:7 And this *is* the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do this thing which He has spoken:

Isa 38:8 Behold, I will bring the shadow on the sundial, which has gone down with the sun on the sundial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward." So the sun returned ten degrees on the dial by which it had gone down.

As if the word of the Lord wasn't enough - God did a miracle. David Guzik wrote, "By bringing the shadow of the sundial move backward, it gave *more time* in a day - just as God gave Hezekiah *more time*."

The remains verses are Hezekiah's response to the news that he would live fifteen more years.

Isa 38:15 "What shall I say? He has both spoken to me, And He Himself has done *it*. I shall walk carefully all my years In the bitterness of my soul.

Isa 38:16 O Lord, by these *things men* live; And in all these *things is* the life of my spirit; So You will restore me and make me live.

Isa 38:17 Indeed *it was* for *my own* peace *That* I had great bitterness; But You have lovingly *delivered* my soul from the pit of corruption, For You have cast all my sins behind Your back.

Isa 38:18 For Sheol cannot thank You, Death cannot praise You; Those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your truth.

Isa 38:19 The living, the living man, he shall praise You, As I *do* this day; The father shall make known Your truth to the children.

Isa 38:20 "The LORD *was ready* to save me; Therefore we will sing my songs with stringed instruments All the days of our life, in the house of the LORD."

Two things to note in Hezekiah's thanksgiving:

1. In verse seventeen, when he said it was for his "own peace," he was acknowledging that this was a selfish request that didn't include what might be best for the nation.
2. In verse nineteen, he promised to teach his children. This is going to be a failure.

Isa 38:21 Now Isaiah had said, "Let them take a lump of figs, and apply *it* as a poultice on the boil, and he shall recover."

Hezekiah had a killer boil. Figs do have a few medicinal uses, but we are to understand this as a miracle. The poultice was a way of showing obedience to God, and trusting Him to heal even though the method made no sense.

Isa 38:22 And Hezekiah had said, "What *is* the sign that I shall go up to the house of the LORD?"

We read about the sundial-sign earlier. Lots of signs under the Old Covenant to bolster the faith of God's saints. Not so much today, but that's OK.

We have spiritual resources that these guys would be amazed with. We have the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit, as well as the complete revelation of God's Word. It is everything we need for life and for godliness. We lack no good thing.

So far, so good. That was about to change.

#2 You Rethink With Isaiah
About The Healing
(Chapter 39)

Speaking of history and hypothetical questions... It is sometimes asked, "If you could, would you travel back in time and kill baby Hitler?"

This pops-up in *Avengers Endgame* when Rhoadie suggests they travel back in time and kill baby Thanos.

I like Ben Shapiro's brief but poignant answer: "The truth is no pro-life person would kill baby Hitler. Baby Hitler was a baby."

This is going to become relevant in a moment because Hezekiah is going to father Manasseh - and that's not so good for the nation. First Hezekiah does something stupid.

Isa 39:1 At that time Merodach-Baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that he had been sick and had recovered.

Isa 39:2 And Hezekiah was pleased with them, and showed them the house of his treasures - the silver and gold, the spices and precious ointment, and all his armory - all that was found among his treasures. There was nothing in his house or in all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them.

What is it that Dana Carvey always used to say when imitating George H. W. Bush? "Wouldn't be prudent." Hezekiah's actions definitely were not prudent. He took the Babylonians into the Temple, and showed them his wealth.

But not his true wealth. The wealth of the Temple was their God. The Temple was where He graciously condescended to meet with them.

Isa 39:3 Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah, and said to him, "What did these men say, and from where did they come to you?" So Hezekiah said, "They came to me from a far country, from Babylon."

Isa 39:4 And he said, "What have they seen in your house?" So Hezekiah answered, "They have seen all that *is* in my house; there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them."

Hezekiah had come through adversity, but prosperity would be his immediate downfall. We tend to forget how difficult it is to serve God in prosperity.

- Jesus said it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God.
- The history of Israel in their Promised Land is that whenever they prospered, spiritual apathy set in, leading to apostasy and God's discipline.

When you are doing alright, and life is pretty good, that is when you are the most vulnerable to attack. **Prosperity is dangerous.**

Isa 39:5 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD of hosts:

Isa 39:6 'Behold, the days are coming when all that *is* in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,' says the LORD.

Isa 39:7 'And they shall take away *some* of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.' "

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came in three waves, ultimately leaving Jerusalem, its walls, and the First Temple as smoking ruins. The Jews endured a seventy-year captivity as discipline.

Isa 39:8 So Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "The word of the LORD which you have spoken *is* good!" For he said, "At least there will be peace and truth in my days."

Wow! Did you catch that? "Babylon is coming to ruin us? Great! It won't happen until I'm dead and gone." Hezekiah has no remorse; he does not repent.

In fact, **he becomes a Calvinist.** Here is what I mean:

1. Earlier he had prayed to be healed, believing that even though God foreknew his death, it could definitely be changed.
2. Now he resigns himself to thinking that, since God has foreordained the Babylonian invasion, there was nothing he could do about it.

BTW: The fact that foreknowledge is not always because something is foreordained does not mean God is caught off guard. He accomplishes His will through providence, keeping His plan on track.

One result of Hezekiah's additional years was the birth of a son, Manasseh.

2Ch 33:1 Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem.

2Ch 33:2 But he did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel.

2Ch 33:3 For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down; he raised up altars for the Baals, and made wooden images; and he worshiped all the host of heaven and served them.

2Ch 33:4 He also built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem shall My name be forever."

2Ch 33:5 And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD.

2Ch 33:6 Also he caused his sons to pass through the fire in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom; he practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft and sorcery, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger.

2Ch 33:7 He even set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God, of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, "In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever;

2Ch 33:8 and I will not again remove the foot of Israel from the land which I have appointed for your fathers - only if they are careful to do all that I have commanded them, according to the whole law and the statutes and the ordinances by the hand of Moses."

2Ch 33:9 So Manasseh seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel.

If you could, would you go back in time and kill baby Manasseh? No, of course not; but his birth after Hezekiah was healed led to much suffering. In fact, Jeremiah wrote, "I [YHWH] will hand them over to trouble, to all kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, for what he did in Jerusalem" (15:4).

It does seem that it would have been better if Manasseh was never born. Dr. J. Vernon McGee and his wife suffered the death of their firstborn child. He eventually wrote a long tract about it. Some of his points:

- A brief life is not an incomplete life.
- You can be assured that all is well with your child.
- Heaven should be more real to you.
- You will see your little one someday.

He also speculated about what if his child had lived:

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Isaiah 38-39

*And When I Die, and When I'm Dead,
Dead and Gone, There'll Be One Child Born
to Be Carried Off"*

God knew what was in the future for your child. Perhaps there would have been a life of illness, a disfiguring accident or brain damage, or a lingering, incurable disease. God knew all of this, and I am confident that He has given you the better part. You can be certain about your child's future now; you could not be certain if your little one were alive.

I should mention that both Hezekiah and Manasseh returned to the Lord before they died:

2 Ch 32:26 Then Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah.

2Ch 33:12 Now when [Manasseh] was in affliction, he implored the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers,

2Ch 33:13 and prayed to Him; and He received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God.

Pray for healing... Or for deliverance... Remembering that you cannot know what the future holds - but you can know Who holds the future. **Don't assume healing, or deliverance, is better than suffering and death.**

When suffering is your lot in life, know by experience that God's "grace is sufficient for you, [that His] strength is made perfect in weakness. Therefore gladly boast in your infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon you. Take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when you are weak, then you are strong" (Second Corinthians 12:9-10 paraphrased).