

# The Millennium Forecast

The Book of Isaiah




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Text  
Isaiah 38 & 39

Topic  
Given 15 additional years to live, Hezekiah commits a serious foreign policy blunder that will result in some of his sons being carried off to Babylon

Title  
***"Carry Off, My Wayward Sons"***

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-  Han Solo is killed and Princess Leia continues fighting against the Empire.
-  John Connor becomes a new US Senator as Sarah Connor cheers for him.
-  Alan, Ellie and the children finally make their way to a helicopter. But the hungry T-Rex arrives just in time to kill them all in an absolute bloodbath.

Those are the proposed alternate endings to *The Return of the Jedi*, *Terminator 2*, and *Jurassic Park*.

## **Our text in Isaiah is famous for its alternate ending.**

- The LORD sent the prophet Isaiah to announce to King Hezekiah of Judah, "Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live' " (38:1).
- Hezekiah prayed, and the LORD sent Isaiah back to say, "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" (38:4-5).

**The LORD chose an alternate ending in which Hezekiah doesn't die for 15 years.**

By the time we dismiss, you might think it would have been better for Hezekiah to die.

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 It Is Far Better For You To Die**, and **#2 It Can Be Far Worse For You To Live**.

### **#1 - It Is Better For You To Die (Chapter 38)**

Before you think I've gone too far, remember the apostle Paul said, "For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is far better*" (**Philippians 1:23**).

King Hezekiah of Judah, a good king, was on his deathbed. I feel sorry for him - not because he was dying, but because he knew so little about death. He feared it, and that fear stoked his fervency to live.

Isa 38:1 In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death...

"Those days" are *before* the LORD defeated the Assyrian army in chapter thirty-seven. Look at verse six: "I will [in the future] deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria."

Isa 38:1 ... 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.' "

Isaiah was blunt. He worded his announcement in a way it was impossible to misunderstand. "You *will* die; you *won't* live."

When you talk about death, *be blunt*. Not rude, but straightforward and without euphemisms like, "Passed away," or "No longer with us," or "Gone to a better place."

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

It was the only posture Hezekiah could assume, since he was confined to his bed.

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.

God's chosen nation of Israel was promised earthly blessings for obedience. They were promised a king and a kingdom. The kingdom promises involve real estate in the Holy Land and a physical descendant of David to sit on the throne in Jerusalem. He will rule nations of the Earth. It was therefore quite right for Hezekiah to pray as he did. He wasn't boasting.

### **Hezekiah's prayer is *not* a good model for us.**

In the Church Age in which we live, we should not expect material and physical blessing for obedience. Our blessings are spiritual blessings in the heavenlies. God provides all we need to live godly lives as His martyrs.

We, too, anticipate the future, physical kingdom. In fact, we are told in several spots that we will rule with the Lord. But for now we are *living* stones, being built up as a *spiritual* house.

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.

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

In the parallel account in Second Kings we're told, "And it happened, before Isaiah had gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him" (20:4).

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.'

Asking for signs was common in Old Testament times. We talk more about being led as we seek the Lord in prayer and the Word.

- God told Hezekiah he was going to die. Not just eventually, but from this illness, and soon.
- God told Hezekiah he was *not* going to die; he'd be healed and have fifteen more years to live.

If you meditate on this long enough, smoke will start coming out of your ears. That might be an exaggeration; but it *is* quite the conundrum. There are deep theological truths to be pondered. Divine healing is one. We also see effective prayer... God's sovereignty... God's foreknowledge and foreordination... And God's providence. There is a miracle thrown in, too, just for good measure.

Any attempt to reconcile "You're going to die, You're not going to die," must allow for two things:

1. **Hezekiah's condition was terminal.** It was his time to die. This wasn't a test to see what he would do or say. It wasn't a close call, or a wake-up call. The LORD wasn't trying to psyche him out. There is no other way to read Isaiah's blunt announcement.
2. **God acted on Hezekiah's prayer.** He decided to add 15 years to Hezekiah's life. His doing so was not a matter of some kind of meticulous pre-determinism. It was not inevitable, but evitable! It was, in fact, choosing *an alternate ending*.

Alternate endings are not infrequent in God's Word. Jonah delivered God's message to the city of Nineveh. "He cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

The king of Assyria led the people in repentance. "Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it" (3:10). It wasn't he alternate ending Jonah wanted.

If God **cannot** "relent" from what He says He is going to do, does it diminish Him? *It does*. It means everything that happens is God's will. Gordon H. Clark puts it like this: "If a man gets drunk and shoots his family, *it was the will of God that he should do it.*"

If God **can** "relent" from what He says He is going to do, does it diminish Him? *It doesn't*. It enhances Him. It reveals that He is so GOD that His sovereignty can allow for mankind's free will without affecting the overall program of redemption.

I don't want to be someone who diminishes God because I need to fit Him into a system of theology.

BTW: When faced with two or more biblical alternatives on something that is nonessential, do yourself and everyone else a favor and choose one that promotes

the Lord as compassionate, long-suffering with sinners, not willing that any would perish, but that all would come to eternal life.

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

I forget that Hezekiah was musical. Some scholars believe he wrote as many as ten of the Psalms.<sup>1</sup> This "writing" may be meant to be sung.

Hezekiah's "writing" about his healing needs little commentary. I'll highlight a few ways the Church differs from Hezekiah's understanding of death.

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."

If a believer dies young, is he or she is deprived? Entering Heaven is no deprivation. We have the revelation that God prepares a grand entrance for us.

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.

He regretted he would no longer see God "in the land of the living." We can't wait until we don't see through a glass darkly but are face-to-face with Jesus.

Hezekiah was sad because he would not "observe man... among the inhabitants of the world." He didn't know that he would see and fellowship with David and Abraham and Noah, etc.

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.

His life was like a well-used "shepherd's tent." We are all about thinking we are tents. That is, our current bodies. Unlike Hezekiah, we can't wait to be rid of our current bodies for the new & improved eternal model. "For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven" (First Corinthians 5:1-2).

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<sup>1</sup> Psalms 20, 21, 23, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30, 32 & 34

When a believer dies in the Church Age, he or she is absent from their physical body, but immediately present with the Lord. We have an excitement to move on to Heaven. It is home.

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.

One of the ways I do not want to die is having a "lion" crush my bones.

Hezekiah was experiencing 24/7 pain. He felt as though God were giving him a slow death.

### **Life is a slow death that can become sudden death.**

We are always one heartbeat away from either death or the rapture:

- Both can be said to be imminent.
- Both immediately usher us into the physical presence of Jesus.

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!

If you were to ask him, "How are you today?" he'd answer, "Oppressed," as he moaned.

In verses fifteen through twenty, Hezekiah notes his response to the LORD healing him.

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."

Tucked away in this lyric are a number of promises Hezekiah made as his response to the LORD's graciousness:

- He says he will "walk carefully" in "bitterness of soul." That is, he will take his walk seriously, and not waste the extra years God granted. Yeah, that didn't happen.
- He repents that "it was for his own peace" that he wanted to be healed, not for the good of the nation. Yeah, we'll see he cares little for the nation.
- As a "father" he would "make known" the LORD to his children. Nope. He was a complete failure there. His son Manasseh would be maybe the worst king ever, reigning for 55 years.

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."

I have to believe they had already tried this common treatment. The LORD's prescription, coupled with a sign, is what makes it miraculous.

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

We'll see the "sign" in a moment.

**H**ezekiah said that death cannot praise God, only a living man can (v18-19). Sure, once you're dead, someone needs to take your place in the choir. It doesn't mean that death is a defeat. The voices of martyrs cry out in every generation.

Our NT attitude is much different. We are to adopt the advice given by the apostle Paul, "For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain. 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).

Charles Spurgeon wrote, "*Never fear dying, beloved. Dying is the last, but the least matter that a Christian has to be anxious about. Fear living - that is a hard battle to fight, a stern discipline to endure, a rough voyage to undergo.*"

## **#2 - Healing You Might Be A Problem For You (Chapter 39)**

**Bo Jackson, Mark Spitz, Bjorn Borg, and Joe Lewis have something in common.**

They each were failures in their comeback attempts.

Hezekiah wasn't the same after getting up from his deathbed. Knowing he had fifteen more years had a decidedly negative affect on him. He committed a huge foreign policy gaffe, and his attitude about it should shock us. As suggested earlier, it might have been better if he had died.

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.

Babylon would conquer Assyria and replace her as God's hand of discipline against the nations, including Israel.

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.

US presidents are known for their policies. The New Deal, the New Frontier, the Great Society, etc. We could accurately call Hezekiah's, the Pride Policy.

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."

He asked probing questions. Hezekiah was thus made to confess what he had done.

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.



Looking forward almost 200 years, Isaiah said Babylon would conquer Judah. The Angel of the LORD and His mighty "hosts" of angels would not engage.

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.' "

Think about some idolatrous Babylonian monarch taking your boys, making them eunuchs, feeding them food forbidden by the Law of Moses, and demanding they worship idols. Would you be enraged? Not Hezekiah. He was 'as cool as the other side of the pillow.'

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."

**This is top five, at least, in most selfish statements in the Bible.**

What happened to the Hezekiah who went face-to-the-wall in prayer? That guy was gone. He coasted for the next fifteen years. He had guaranteed security.

1. Have you ever said, "If you've got your health, you've got everything?" You are one symptom away from a life-altering diagnosis.
2. How about this one: "I've been poor, and I've been rich. *Rich is better!*" There is no security in money; not really.

Physical security can hinder your relationship with God. Prosperity is a trap.

God heals. Pray for healing, but in the context of believing that "to die is gain."

I want to mention another, fantastic alternate ending. The apostle Paul, in First Corinthians, said: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1:9-11).

**God's gift of salvation is the alternate ending He desires for every one of us.**