

pray is not necessarily a sign of submission to God's intractable will. Rather, it may be a sign of apathy and unwillingness to wrestle with God" (Oswalt 1986: 675).

vv7-8 "G. A. Smith paints a graphic picture of the dying king watching from his sickroom as the shadow inexorably descended the steps. How easily he could have associated his own ebbing strength with that lengthening shadow and contemplated the coming sunset with dread. Thus when the prophet offered to move the shadow forward ten steps, one can imagine the king reacting with alarm. Much better to move it backward, up the steps, as a sign of the divine reprieve (2 K. 20:9-10)" (Oswalt 1986: 678).

vv10-20 "He remembers the numbed shock he felt first (10), his anger at God (*you made an end of me*, 12), his tearful exhaustion (14a), and his feeble cry for help as he lifted his *eyes*, at last, to heaven (14b). But then, with that upward look, it was as though the knife of his suffering was turned around, and he was able to grasp it by the handle instead of the blade. The fact that it was the Lord who had afflicted him (15a) became a cause for gratitude rather than anger (17). It gave him the opportunity to experience the saving power of God not only in his body, but in his spirit as well (16). And out of that came a new humility (15b), a deeper appreciation of God's love (17b), an assurance of forgiveness (17c), and a determination to *praise* God and tell others about him for as long as he was given the strength to do so (18-20). Such lessons are priceless, but often it is only by looking back, as Hezekiah does here, that we can see how suffering has been the means God has used to teach them to us" (Webb 1996: 157).

v21 "All healing is of God. Sometimes he intervenes directly to produce health. At other times he works through intervening means, as here. But it is misleading to limit divine healing to those instances where no intervening means appears. If the poultice was instrumental in Hezekiah's healing, it was still divine providence which brought Isaiah to Hezekiah's bedside with the remedy at that moment" (Oswalt 1986: 691).

SOURCES CITED

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ISAIAH 38: HEZEKIAH'S ILLNESS

OUTLINE OF ISAIAH

- I. Facing judgment by Assyria, the nation is called to trust the Lord (1-35)
 - A. Judah's sin requires exile, but a remnant will return (1-12)
 - B. The nations will be judged, and therefore they should not be trusted (13-23)
 - C. The Lord will rule over the earth and redeem his people (24-27)
 - D. The Holy One of Israel will replace faithless rulers with a righteous king (28-35)
- II. Facing Assyria and Babylon, Hezekiah wavers in his trust in the Lord (36-39)
 - A. Hezekiah's faith is tested by the Assyrian attack (36)
 - B. Hezekiah trusts the Lord and is delivered from the enemy (37)
 - C. **Hezekiah's faith is tested by a fatal illness (38)**
 - D. Hezekiah fails to trust the Lord and will be delivered to the enemy (39)
- III. Facing exile by Babylon, the nation is called to trust the Lord (40-66)

OUTLINE OF ISAIAH 38

- I. Hezekiah's deliverance from death (38:1-8)
 - A. Hezekiah prays that he will not die (38:1-3)
 - B. Isaiah promises deliverance for Hezekiah and Jerusalem (38:4-6)
 - C. The Lord gives Hezekiah a sign of his deliverance (38:7-8)
- II. Hezekiah's reflections on his illness (38:9-20)
- III. Flashback (38:21-22)

CONNECTIONS

Chapter 38 is necessary background for chapter 39. Chapters 36-37 show Hezekiah in a good light, trusting the Lord. Chapters 38-39 reveal that he did not consistently trust the Lord. Because of his faith in 36-37, Jerusalem is delivered from Assyria; because of his lack of faith in 38-39, Jerusalem will be handed over to Babylon.

Chapters 36-37 answer the big question posed in chapters 1-35: will you trust God? When Hezekiah has faith, the Lord brings victory. Chapters 38-39 show that his faith falters when he trusts the Babylonians, and consequently the nation will go into exile in Babylon. This sets the stage for chapters 40-66 in which Isaiah addresses those living in Babylon.

Hezekiah's father, Ahaz, is offered a sign by Isaiah: "Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights" (7:10). Hezekiah is given a sign by Isaiah: "I will make the shadow cast by the sun go back the ten steps it has gone down on the stairway of Ahaz" (38:8).

"But chs. 38 and 39 are also pivotal. For the question must be asked, "If Hezekiah is the ideal representative of the trusting people, why the captivity?" Or, "If God could deliver his people from Assyria, why not Babylon?" Or, "Is not Hezekiah the promised child of 7:14 and 9:6-7? Is he not in fact the Messiah?" Chs. 38-39 answer these questions for us and in so doing point beyond Hezekiah and the Jerusalem of 700 B.C." (Oswalt 1986: 672).

Isaiah 37	Isaiah 38
"I will defend this city and deliver it" (37:35)	"I will deliver you and this city" (38:6)
King Sennacherib lives but is killed	King Hezekiah is about to die but lives
Hezekiah's prayer precedes sign given by Isaiah	Hezekiah's prayer precedes sign given by Isaiah
National miracle	Personal miracle
Hezekiah's prayer in humility	Hezekiah's prayer (not?) in humility (38:3)
Sennacherib's letter of blasphemy (37:10-13)	Hezekiah's letter of faith (38:9-20)

NOTES

"Chapter 38 presents Hezekiah in two lights: positive and negative. On the one hand, he is still the Hezekiah who can turn to God in submission and trust in a moment of dire necessity. But on the other hand, he is a Hezekiah who is distinctly mortal. In fact, the major thrust of the chapter, including the psalm (vv. 9-20), is upon the mortality of flesh" (Oswalt 1986: 673).

v1 "At the time when he least expects it, Hezekiah is confronted by the gaping maw of death. Suddenly all the years upon which he had counted for more achievements and for the enjoyment of those achievements vanish away like a vapor. How easily we human beings consider the years of our lives an inviolate possession. But that is not true. We have only today and perhaps not all of it. We are distinctly dependent creatures, and if such experiences as Hezekiah's help us to face what that fact means for present living and eternal destiny, then they are very salutary experiences indeed" (Oswalt 1986: 683).

v1 "One of these is the reiteration of human helplessness and divine trustworthiness. Even a king is helpless before the onslaught of death. Even the most powerful are laid low in its path. Why then should we put our trust in human mortality?" (Oswalt 1986: 682).

vv2-3 "But the reader is immediately struck by the fact that this prayer is radically different from the humble tone of Hezekiah's prayer in 37:14-20. In this case Hezekiah does not declare his bold and uncompromising faith in God by confessing how great God is or that he is the Creator who rules all the kingdoms of the earth (37:16). He does not repent of any sins (except in 2 Chr 20:26) nor implore God to act in such a way as to proclaim his glory to all the people of the earth (37:20). Why are these two prayers so different? Are they both equally acceptable in the eyes of God? Does Hezekiah actually claim that he deserves better treatment from God because of his good works?" (Smith 2007: 640).

v3 "So illness should be a stimulus to self-examination, and if we can find no disobedience to God, it should be an opportunity for deepening our trust in him and our dependence on him for resources to triumph through the illness" (Oswalt 2003: 430-31).

v5 "This does not mean that matters will always turn out as we wish. But it does mean that prayer can change the course of events, and that failure to