

God's Mercy

Isaiah 38

By Scott Huckaby

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**BIG BEND
BIBLE
FELLOWSHIP**

Isaiah 38:1-8 – Hezekiah's life extended (NIV)

In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, "This is what the Lord says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover."² Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord,³ "Remember, Lord, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.⁴ Then the word of the Lord came to Isaiah:⁵ "Go and tell Hezekiah, 'This is what the Lord, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life.'⁶ And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city."⁷ "This is the Lord's sign to you that the Lord will do what he has promised:⁸ I will make the shadow cast by the sun go back the ten steps it has gone down on the stairway of Ahaz.'" So the sunlight went back the ten steps it had gone down.

v1 – When did Isaiah advise Hezekiah to put your house in order?

In those days: This happened at the time of the Assyrian invasion of Judah, because Jerusalem had not been delivered from the Assyrian threat yet (Isaiah 38:6). The events of this chapter are also recorded in 2 Kings 20:1-11.

- Interpreters agree that the events described in chapters 38 and 39 preceded the invasion of 701 B.C..... the evidence strongly suggests a date of about 712 B.C.

What afflicted Hezekiah?

Was sick and near death: We are not told how Hezekiah became sick. It may have been through something obvious to all, or it may have been through something known only to God. However, Hezekiah became sick, it was certainly permitted by the LORD.

How do we know God had a special affinity for Hezekiah?

Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live: God was remarkably kind to Hezekiah, telling him that his death was near. Not all people are given the time to set their house in order.

- We know from comparing 2 Kings 18:2 with 2 Kings 20:6, that Hezekiah was 39 years old when he learned he would soon die.

v2 – How did Hezekiah react to the bad news?

Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall: This shows how earnest Hezekiah was in his prayer. He directed his prayer in privacy to God, and not to any man.

v3 – What did Hezekiah point out to God in his prayer?

Remember now, O LORD: Hezekiah's prayer sounds a bit self-righteous... his focus is on self-justification and his own merits. It is as if He prayed, "LORD, remember what a good boy I've been and rescue me."

Why might this emphasis on Hezekiah's righteousness be more valid under the Old Covenant?

Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 show blessing and cursing were sent by God on the basis of obedience or disobedience. This is an Old Covenant principle...

Psalm 15:1-2 – *Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart.*

Why wouldn't Hezekiah's principle of prayer be fitting for a Christian today?

Under the New Covenant, we are blessed on the principle of faith in Jesus...

Galatians 3:13-14 – *Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*

We pray in the name of Jesus (John 16:23-24), not in the name of who we are or what we have done.

Why was Hezekiah so undone at the prospect of death?

Hezekiah wept bitterly: Many Christians today would say, “Take me home, LORD!” But Hezekiah lived under the Old Covenant, and at that time there was not a confident assurance of the glory in the life beyond.

How is it the New Covenant better helps us to face death?

Jesus brought life and immortality to light through the gospel...

2 Timothy 1:10 – *but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*

Under the Old Covenant Hezekiah would have regarded this as evidence that God was very displeased with him.

Is the doctrine of eternal security biblical?

When people come to know Christ as their Savior, they are brought into a relationship with God that guarantees their eternal security.

Jude 24 – *To Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy.*

God’s power is able to keep the believer from falling. It is up to Him, not us, to be before His glorious presence.

- Our eternal security is a result of God keeping us, not us maintaining our own salvation.

How did Jesus promise eternal security to His followers?

John 10:28-29 – *I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.*

My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand

Both Jesus and the Father have us firmly grasped in their hand. Who could possibly separate us from the grip of both the Father and the Son?

Is having eternal security a “license” to sin?

This is the most frequent objection to the doctrine of eternal security. And while this may be “technically” true, it is not true in reality. A person who has truly been redeemed by Jesus Christ will not live a life characterized by continuous, willful sin.

- We must draw a distinction between how a Christian should live and what a person must do in order to receive salvation.

The Bible is clear that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-9; John 14:6).

We are saved by grace through faith, but must that salvation be maintained through works?

Galatians 3:3 – *Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?*

If we are saved by faith, our salvation is also maintained and secured by faith. We cannot earn our own salvation. Therefore, neither can we earn the maintenance of our salvation.

- Any denial of eternal security is, in its essence, a belief that we must maintain our own salvation by our own good works and efforts. This is completely antithetical to salvation by grace.

How is it only hypothetical that a Christian has a license to sin?

The Bible makes it clear that a true Christian will not live “any way he wants to.” Christians are new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17) demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), and not the acts of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). First John 3:6-9 clearly states that a true Christian will not live in continual sin.

Romans 6:1-2 – *What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?*

v4-5 – How did God answer Hezekiah’s prayer?

I will add to your days fifteen years: In response to Hezekiah’s prayer, God granted Hezekiah fifteen years more.

Because Hezekiah recovered, was God’s Word (*You shall die and not live*, Isaiah 38:1) proven false?

No; Hezekiah did in fact die, just not as soon as God first announced. Second, when God announces judgment it is almost always an invitation to repent and to receive mercy.

How important was Hezekiah’s prayer?

I have heard your prayer: By all indications, if Hezekiah had not made his passionate prayer, then his life would not have been extended. Prayer matters.

- In fact, God gave two gifts to Hezekiah. First, He gave the gift of an extended life. Second, He gave the gift of knowing he only had fifteen years left. If he were wise, this would still give King Hezekiah the motivation to walk right with God and to set his house in order.

v6 – What other promise did God make to Hezekiah?

I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria: This promise is in accord with the LORD’s previous prophecies of deliverance, and dates this chapter as being before God destroyed the Assyrian army (Isaiah 37:36-37).

I will deliver you...and I will defend this city: The connection of the two promises indicates that one would confirm the other. When Hezekiah recovered his health, he could know that God would also deliver him from the Assyrians.

v7-8 – Why did God give Hezekiah a sign to confirm His promise?

God showed even more mercy to Hezekiah. God was under no obligation to give this sign. In real love, God gave Hezekiah more than he needed or deserved.

How does God show the same mercy to us?

It should be enough for God to simply say to us, “I love you.” But God did so much more to demonstrate His love to us (John 3:16, Romans 5:8).

What was the sign God gave to Hezekiah?

Behold, I will bring the shadow of the sundial...ten degrees backward: God promised to do something completely miraculous for the confirming sign. And it happened just as God promised: *So the sun returned ten degrees on the dial by which it had gone down.*

How was this sundial sign highly appropriate for Hezekiah?

By having the shadow of the sundial move backward, it gave more time in a day — just as God gave Hezekiah more time.

How did God accomplish the miracle of the sundial?

We don’t know. God could have simply “moved the sun back.” Or, He may have provided the miraculous appearance of time moving back on the sundial of Ahaz. It doesn’t really matter how God did it; He has miraculous resources and ways we know nothing about.

Isaiah 38:9-22 – Hezekiah’s response to his healing (NIV)

⁹*A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah after his illness and recovery: ¹⁰I said, “In the prime of my life must I go through the gates of death and be robbed of the rest of my years?” ¹¹I said, “I will not again see the Lord himself in the land of the living; no longer will I look on my fellow man, or be with those who now dwell in this world.*

¹²*Like a shepherd’s tent my house has been pulled down and taken from me. Like a weaver I have rolled up my life, and he has cut me off from the loom; day and night you made an end of me. ¹³I waited patiently till dawn, but like a lion he broke all my bones; day and night you made an end of me. ¹⁴I cried like a swift or thrush, I moaned like a mourning dove. My eyes grew weak as I looked to the heavens. I am being threatened; Lord, come*

to my aid!” ¹⁵But what can I say? He has spoken to me, and he himself has done this. I will walk humbly all my years because of this anguish of my soul.

¹⁶*Lord, by such things people live; and my spirit finds life in them too. You restored me to health and let me live.*

¹⁷*Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction; you have put all my sins behind your back.*

¹⁸*For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness. ¹⁹The living, the living—they praise you, as I am doing today; parents tell their children about your faithfulness. ²⁰The Lord will save me, and we will sing with stringed instruments all the days of our lives in the temple of the Lord. ²¹Isaiah had said, “Prepare a poultice of figs and apply it to the boil, and he will recover.”*

²²*Hezekiah had asked, “What will be the sign that I will go up to the temple of the Lord?”*

v9-10 – What did Hezekiah lament?

In the prime of my life I shall go to the gates of Sheol: The Hebrew word Sheol refers to “the grave” or “the place of the dead.” Here, Hezekiah laments the news of his impending death.

Is Sheol hell?

The term sheol is the Hebrew equivalent to the term hades in the New Testament Greek. The New Testament reveals that sheol/hades is a temporary place where souls are kept as they await the final resurrection. Prior to the cross, sheol/hades had two compartments, “paradise,” or “Abraham’s bosom” and “torments” (Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23). Since the cross, the spirits of the righteous dead go to be with Jesus in heaven.

2 Corinthians 5:8 – We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

Are there still two compartments in Hades?

There may be... if there is, no one is being added to the Abraham’s Bosom side since the cross. However, some think that Jesus went there between His death and resurrection to declare victory and bring the people there to heaven... We know He went there:

Luke 23:43 – Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.

This is reinforced by:

1 Peter 3:18-19 – Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison

After Jesus declared victory, He took those Old Testament saints to heaven:

Ephesians 4:8-10 – *Therefore He says: “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.” (Now this, “He ascended”—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)*

What are some other terms that the Bible uses for hell?

- **Abyss, or bottomless pit** – a prison for certain demons (Luke 8:31; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). Or more generally, it is considered part of the realm of the dead (Romans 10:7 uses it in the sense of Hades).
- Gehenna is a Greek translation of the Hebrew “Valley of Hinnom,” a place outside Jerusalem’s walls desecrated by Molech worship and human sacrifice (2 Chronicles 28:1-3; Jeremiah 32:35). It was also a garbage dump where rubbish and refuse were burned. The smoldering fires and festering worms of the Valley of Hinnom made it a graphic and effective picture of the fate of the damned. This place is also called the “**lake of fire**” in Revelation 20:13-15, prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41).
- Tartarus – from ancient Greek mythology it can be defined as “the deepest abyss of Hades.”

v11 – What did Hezekiah expect after he died?

That he would no longer see anyone in the realm of mortals. Because he’d be in the afterlife.

v12 – What analogy was Hezekiah making about his life?

That his mortal life was like fabric being woven but the time would come when it would be complete and removed from the loom.

v13 – Who was in control of Hezekiah’s life?

Hezekiah acknowledged that it was God who was cutting his life short and had power over him like a lion.

v14 – How was Hezekiah’s view of death different from what a Christian should have?

O LORD, I am oppressed: Since Hezekiah lived before the finished work of Jesus, he lived under the bondage of the fear of death...

Hebrews 2:14-15 – *Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*

How different for the believer in Jesus Christ, for whom death has no victory or sting (1 Corinthians 15:53-55).

How did Hezekiah see his cries out to God about his death?

Like a crane or a swallow, so I chattered; I mourned like a dove: His cries shrill and mournful like a bird being just as dependent on Him.

v15 – What was Hezekiah’s reaction to God extending his life?

What shall I say? He has both spoken to me, and He Himself has done it: When God answered his prayer, all Hezekiah could do was praise God. He knew that it was all the LORD’s work, both in word (*spoken to me*) and deed (*done it*). So, Hezekiah was speechless (*What shall I say?*).

I shall walk carefully all my years: This is a good promise Hezekiah makes, and one often on the lips of the person God has spared. But actions speak louder than words.

What did Hezekiah do with these added 15 years?

He fathered a son who would succeed him on the throne of Judah. Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, it is written that he was 12 years old when he became king (2 Kings 21:1).

2 Kings 21:2 – *And 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*
Sadly, fathering Manasseh was not a worthy achievement. In fact, God targeted Judah for judgment because of the terrible sins of Manasseh (2 Kings 21:10-15).

In retrospect, why was God’s original plan to cut Hezekiah’s life short a better one?

God knew that if Hezekiah lived, he would give birth to this wicked successor. Sometimes it is best to simply leave our lot with the LORD, and leave what even seems to be clearly good up to His wisdom.

v16 – By what things do men live?

Hezekiah was simply acknowledging that all people live under the threat of death and it is up to God whether they live or die.

v17 – What was Hezekiah’s reason for why he wanted God to extend his life?

It was for my own peace that I had great bitterness:
Hezekiah is to be admired for his accurate self-knowledge, and his honesty. He admits that it was not for God’s glory or honor, or even for the glory or honor of his kingdom that he was troubled over his impending death and that he wanted his life spared. It was for his own peace.

v18-19 – How did Hezekiah contrast his perception of the mortal life with the afterlife?

He was uncertain of what the afterlife would be like, even in the matter of praising God. That could certainly happen among mortals but thought that might not be the case in death. He was even uncertain about whether he learn answers to the mysteries of live after death (*cannot hope for Your truth*).

Since more about life after death is in the New Testament, why don't churches talk more about it?

Probably several reasons...

- It is in the category of prophecy and they just don't want to go there
- They might just have to bring up hell and they just don't want to go there
- They are too focused on living in this world and the topic of heaven doesn't fit in with that agenda.

v20 – What was the summary of Hezekiah's response to the Lord's deliverance?

Hezekiah shows the logical response to God's great deliverance — praise.

v21 – What was Isaiah's role in Hezekiah's recovery?

Let them take a lump of figs, and apply it as a poultice on the boil, and he shall recover: Apparently, God used this medical treatment — at the very least, He used it as a sign — to bring Hezekiah's healing. God can, and often does, bring healing through medical treatments, and apart from an unusual direction from God, medical treatment should never be rejected in the name of "faith."

v22 – Why did Hezekiah ask this question?

What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the LORD? Hezekiah wanted a sign that would go up to the house of the Lord when he died. His healing was that sign that he asked for that he would go to the house of the Lord after he died.

What applications come to mind from our discussion?

- We are blessed to live in a time when more has been revealed about the glory of life after death; be joyful!
- Eternal security is a true doctrine, anything less is salvation-by-works.
- Christians are forgiven but this does not mean we have a license to sin; any other perspective is not biblical.
- God is merciful and His ultimate act of mercy was making it possible for our sins to be forgiven.
- Jesus had more to say about hell than heaven because He didn't want anyone to go there; trust in Him!
- We should spend more time considering the glory of life after death, it helps us have an eternal perspective.