



Highlights From the Book of Isaiah

To Download this lesson go to:

<http://www.purifiedbyfaith.com/Isaiah/Isaiah.htm>

<https://www.wikiart.org/en/ernest-meissonier/isaiah>

Outline of the Book of Isaiah

I. Isaiah's Warning of Judgment on Israel (1-39)

A. Judgement and Hope for Jerusalem (1-12)

B. Judgement and Hope for the Nations (13-27)

C. True Deliverance Is Found, Not in Egypt, But in the Lord (28-35)

D. The Lessons of History (36-39)

A. The Deliverance of Jerusalem from Assyria (36-37)

B. Hezekiah's Illness and Recovery (38)

C. A Visit From the Envoys of Babylon (39)

II. The Promise of Future Hope in the New Jerusalem (40-66)

Hezekiah's Illness and Recovery (38:1-22)

- This week we will be looking at Hezekiah's "Psalm" which he wrote *in response* to his illness and recovery (38:9-20)
- I have divided this psalm into *four* parts:
 - The Gates of Sheol (38:9-11)
 - Images of Despair (38:12-14)
 - Divine Restoration (38:15-17)
 - Giving Thanks in the Lord's Temple (38:18-20)

The Gates of Sheol (38:9-11)

38:9 This is the prayer of King Hezekiah of Judah when he was sick and then recovered from his illness: ¹⁰ “I thought, ‘In the middle of my life I must walk through the gates of Sheol, I am deprived of the rest of my years.’ ¹¹ “I thought, ‘I will no longer see the LORD in the land of the living, I will no longer look on humankind with the inhabitants of the world.

38:9 *This is the prayer of King Hezekiah of Judah when he was sick and then recovered from his illness: ¹⁰ “I thought, ‘**In the middle of my life** I must walk **through the gates of Sheol**, I am deprived of the rest of my years.’*

- This section introduces a song (or psalm) of thanksgiving composed by Hezekiah after the LORD healed him from his fatal disease.
- In this psalm he reflects on his experience while ill (38:10-14) and then offers praise for God’s healing (38:15-20).
- It is evident that *during* his illness Hezekiah’s thoughts had been very *gloomy*: he lamented the fact that he was going to die while “*in the middle of [his] life*”.
- Hezekiah would have been about thirty-nine years old at the time, which is about *half* of the expected lifespan in his day (around seventy or eighty years – see Ps. 90:10).
- He describes his premature death as going “*through the gates of Sheol*”.

38:9 *This is the prayer of King Hezekiah of Judah when he was sick and then recovered from his illness: ¹⁰ “I thought, ‘In the middle of my life I must walk through the gates of **Sheol**, I am deprived of the rest of my years.’*

- “*Sheol*” is a term about which there is much discussion among biblical scholars.
- Most modern translations simply transliterate this Hebrew word and capitalize it as the name given to the place where people go when they die.
- But is it a place of punishment for the wicked (i.e. hell), or a common destiny for all mankind (i.e. the grave)?
- Or perhaps, though everyone goes there, different compartments exist, reflecting the different destinations of the righteous and the wicked?
- This unique term is used throughout the Old Testament to refer to the afterlife, without a lot of detail given as to exactly what that looked like.

38:9 *This is the prayer of King Hezekiah of Judah when he was sick and then recovered from his illness: ¹⁰ “I thought, ‘In the middle of my life I must walk through the gates of Sheol, **I am deprived of the rest of my years.**’*

- Hezekiah then says, “*I am deprived of the rest of my years*”.
- The Hebrew word that Hezekiah uses here (translated “*deprived*”) implies that he viewed this “deprivation” of the latter portion of his life a **punishment** – which then only **adds** to his bitterness.
- In other words, in the normal course of events Hezekiah might have expected a longer life.
- But now he believes that, because of his sins, God is taking away from him what would ordinarily remain of his life.

38:11 *“I thought, ‘I will no longer see the LORD in the land of the living, I will no longer look on humankind with the inhabitants of the world.*”

- Hezekiah is speaking as an Old Testament believer for whom the kind of life that he would experience after death was *somewhat unclear* because, at that point, there been very little revelation concerning it.
- So, Hezekiah does not focus here on what lies *beyond death*, but on what he knows he will leave behind in *this life*.
- For example, he had enjoyed fellowship with the LORD as he worshiped in the temple, and it appears to him that he when he dies, he is going to lose this.

38:11 *“I thought, ‘I will no longer see the LORD in the land of the living, I will no longer look on humankind with the inhabitants of the world.’*

- In the second part of this verse, Hezekiah draws a parallel between divine and *human* fellowship.
- He expects that, *not only* will he miss the fellowship that he has had with the LORD “*in the land of the living*”, but he will *also* miss the fellowship that he’s come to enjoy with other *people* in this “*world*”.
- Ultimately this kind of fellowship is what life is about for the people of God.
- We were made for God and for one another, and to think that he might be *deprived* of these causes Hezekiah great depression and despair.

Images of Despair (38:12-14)

38:12 My dwelling place is removed and taken away from me as a shepherd's tent. I rolled up my life like a weaver rolls cloth; from the loom he cuts me off. You turn day into night and end my life. ¹³ I cry out until morning; like a lion he shatters all my bones; you turn day into night and end my life. ¹⁴ Like a swallow or a thrush I chirp, I coo like a dove; my eyes grow tired from looking up to the sky. O Lord, I am oppressed; help me!

38:12 *My **dwelling place** is **removed** and taken away from me as a **shepherd's tent**. I rolled up my life like a weaver rolls cloth; from the loom he cuts me off. You turn day into night and end my life.*

- Hezekiah describes the dire nature of the change he is about to undergo by using **two** sets of imagery.
- In the **first**, he compares his life to a “**shepherd's tent**” which is taken down forcibly from around him by a storm or an enemy, leaving him exposed.
- Prior to his “**dwelling place**” being “**removed**”, it had **felt** like a **permanent** shelter.
- But now Hezekiah finds that this bodily shelter can be easily **removed** – demonstrating that his bodily existence is vulnerable and fleeting.
- The **second** set of imagery comes from the ancient practice of weaving.
- He refers to himself as having to roll up his life in the same way as a weaver does with cloth taken from a loom.

38:12 *My dwelling place is removed and taken away from me as a shepherd's tent. I rolled up my life like a **weaver** rolls cloth; **from the loom he cuts me off. You turn day into night and end my life.***

- Then he says: *“from the loom he cuts me off”*.
- Once the LORD has decided that the “cloth” of Hezekiah’s life is large enough, he will irreversibly cut the threads that attach Hezekiah to this life.
- The final line of this verse is a direct address to the LORD: *“You turn day into night and end my life.”*
- One day, the *“weaver”* (i.e. the LORD) will suddenly finish his task and *“end [Hezekiah’s] life”*.

38:13 *I cry out until morning; like a lion he shatters all my bones; you turn day into night and end my life.*

- When he says “*I cry out until morning*”, it indicates that the king has spent the **entire night** “*crying out*”.
- He compares the LORD’s act of taking his life, to the act of a lion taking down his prey.
- He describes the LORD as shattering of all his bones – crushing and destroying them as a lion does when he attacks his prey.
- He closes this verse by **repeating** a phrase that he used in the **previous** verse, thereby strengthening and confirming what he had previously said: “*you turn day into night and end my life*”.

38:14 *Like a swallow or a thrush I chirp, I coo like a dove; my eyes grow **tired** from looking up to the sky. O Lord, I am oppressed; help me!*

- This verse continues to express the king's sense of helplessness: his cries are like the chirping of a bird, or the moaning coo of a dove.
- He has looked up to God, in what seems like a futile request for help, for such a long time that his eyes have grown weak and "*tired*".
- Nevertheless, he will **not** give up his plea; he knows that, although God may be the one crushing his bones, God is the only one who cares enough to deliver him.

Divine Restoration (38:15-17)

38:15 But 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 men 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. (NIV translation)

38:15 *But **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.*

- Hezekiah now *transitions* from talking about his *past distress* and he begins to describe his *response* to the LORD's decision to *heal* him.
- "*What can I say?*" conveys Hezekiah's amazement at what has happened.
- He can hardly believe what the Lord has done for him.
- What words would be adequate to express his gratitude?
- Yet there is this testimony that he *can* unhesitatingly give: the LORD "*has done this*", through the word brought by Isaiah in answer to his prayers (38:4-6).

38:15 *But 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.*

- What has happened to him is going to affect how he will live for the rest of his life: “[he] will walk humbly” throughout “all [his] years” that have been so graciously added to his lifespan.
- “*because of this anguish of my soul*” refers back to Hezekiah’s humbling experience of his own mortality.
- The memory of what has happened to him will be constantly in his mind, and so he will not lose sight of his dependence on the LORD.

38:16 *Lord, by such things men live; and my spirit finds life in them too. You restored me to health and let me live.*

- Hezekiah has expressed some profound truths in this verse.
- He begins by addressing God as the Sovereign One ("*Lord*").
- Then he makes a general statement that it is "*by such things*" (i.e. the LORD's decrees) that "*men live*".
- Next he applies this general truth to himself.
- Through the LORD's gracious decrees the very life of his own soul is preserved.
- Finally, in prayer, he addresses God as the One who restores his health and preserves his life: "*You restored me to health and let me live.*"

38:17 *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.*

- So Hezekiah is now able to look back on his experience of “*anguish*” with a new depth of understanding.
- It had been “*for [his] benefit*” that the LORD had intervened in his life in this way and led him along the path of suffering.
- Despite the king’s reaction to the LORD’s chastening hand on him at the time, the LORD has “*kept [him] from the pit of destruction*”.
- This deliverance was possible only because God had decisively dealt with the fundamental problem of Hezekiah’s “*sins*”.
- By an act of divine forgiveness, the LORD had “*put all [Hezekiah’s] sins behind [his] back*”.

Giving Thanks in the Lord's Temple (38:18-20)

38:18 Indeed Sheol does not give you thanks; death does not praise you. Those who descend into the Pit do not anticipate your faithfulness. ¹⁹ The living person, the living person, he gives you thanks, as I do today. A father tells his sons about your faithfulness. ²⁰ The LORD is about to deliver me, and we will celebrate with music for the rest of our lives in the LORD's temple."

38:18 *Indeed Sheol does not give you thanks; death does not **praise** you. Those who descend into **the Pit do not anticipate** your **faithfulness**.*

- Hezekiah explains that the LORD's loving deliverance of him from death has occurred because the purpose of life is to praise God with thanksgiving, and Hezekiah could not see that happening if he had ended up in the grave.
- There were times when Old Testament believers were overwhelmed by the gloomy prospect of the grave (cf. Ps. 6:5; 30:9; 88:11-12; 115:17) – especially when they were under conviction of sin.
- Those who died with unforgiven sins would not be able to “*praise*” him.
- “*the Pit*” refers to the grave, and those who have gone down into it are the dead (cf. Ps. 30:3; 88:4; 143:7), who “*do not anticipate*” the saving results of divine “*faithfulness*” to be realized in their lives.

38:18 *Indeed Sheol does not give you thanks; death does not praise you. Those who descend into the Pit do not anticipate your faithfulness.*

- Not *all* Old Testament passages that describe life after death are this gloomy.
- A number of Old Testament scriptures suggested that God's people experience a life in **God's presence** after they die.
- For example, the translation of Enoch (Gen. 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:11) clearly pointed in that direction.
- A couple of the Psalms also seem to imply that God's people will see him after they die:
 - *You will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay. You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. (Ps 16:10–11)*
 - *As for me, because I am innocent I will see your face; when I awake you will reveal yourself to me. (Ps 17:15)*

38:18 *Indeed Sheol does not give you thanks; death does not praise you. Those who descend into the Pit do not anticipate your faithfulness.*

- But the lack of Old Testament passages describing the life of God's people beyond the grave caused many Old Testament saints to focus on serving God in *this world* and enjoying his favor in *this present life*.
- While New Testament revelation has given us a lot of detailed information about what life after death is like for the believer, it has not diminished the significance of serving God in this present life (cf. Rom 12:1ff), and death still remains as the last enemy to be destroyed by Christ (1 Cor. 15:26; Rev. 20:14).

38:19 *The living person, the living person, he gives you thanks, as I do today. A father tells his sons about your faithfulness.*

- It is the “*living person*” who is to praise God.
- Having made this general statement, the king points to himself as an example.
- He himself is a “*living person*”, who indeed lives again, for he has heard the promise of the prophet, and he praises God.
- Likewise “*a father*” will tell “*his sons*” about the “*faithfulness*” of God.
- This was not yet possible in Hezekiah’s case, for as yet he has not had a son.
- Perhaps his utterance of these words is an expression of his belief that God would *give* him a son and that he would live to tell that son of the promises that God had made and that He fulfills.

38:20 *The LORD is about to deliver me, and we will celebrate with music for the rest of our lives in the LORD's temple."*

- In a resounding conclusion to his psalm, Hezekiah again states what it is that lead to its composition: "*The LORD is about to deliver me*"
- Hezekiah had restored the musical element of temple worship (2 Chr. 29:27-30), and so he exhorts the whole congregation to extol the LORD's goodness to their king as they "*celebrate with music*".
- Hezekiah had been promised that after three days he would go up to the temple (2 Kings 20:5),
- So he envisions a sacred procession "*in the LORD's temple*", not just on that *first* return there, but "*for the rest of our lives*", an expression which reflects the special extension to his own life which he will dedicate to the service of the LORD.

Next Time

I plan to a quick look at the brief description of Hezekiah's healing given at the end of this section (38:21-22) and then I plan to look at "A Visit From the Envoys of Babylon" in Isaiah 39:1-8 – the final passage in this historical narrative portion of Isaiah.

Class Discussion Time



Class Discussion Time

- Were you surprised to hear that the OLD Testament has so little to say about life after death?
- How should the vast amount of new information that we have been given in the New Testament affect **our** attitude towards dying?
- As you think about your answer to this question, consider this statement by the Apostle Paul:
- *²¹ For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. ²² Now if I am to go on living in the body, this will mean productive work for me, yet I don't know which I prefer: ²³ I feel torn between the two, because I have a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far, ²⁴ but it is more vital for your sake that I remain in the body. (Phi 1:21-24)*

Class Discussion Time

- One of my commentaries made this observation about today's text:
 - *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 [beneficial] experiences indeed.* (Oswalt, John N)
- Do you agree with this statement?
- Question for one of the young people here this morning: If you were discover today that you have a fatal illness and will be dead sometime in the next few months – how would you feel about that?