

2 Kings Chapter 20

2 Kings 20:1 "In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live."

“In those days ... sick unto death”: This begins a flashback to the period around 713 -712 B.C., some 12 years before Sennacherib’s invasion and some 15 years before Hezekiah’s death (Isa. 38:1-22).

The date of Hezekiah’s sickness poses 3 reasonable possibilities:

1. Since Hezekiah would be given 15 years of life and delivered from the Assyrians (verse 6), the sickness occurred ca. 701 B.C.
2. Since Berodach-baladan (verse 12), died in 703 B.C., the sickness occurred shortly before and was followed by the embassy from Babylon that saw the temple treasures (verses 12-19); or
3. Since Berodach-baladan’s greatest power was (ca. 721-710 B.C.), Hezekiah’s sickness occurred during those years.

The first or second possibility is most likely.

“In those days” is taken by many commentators to be a general designation for the time of Hezekiah’s reign, the events (of chapter 20), actually having taken place before those of (18:8 – 19:37). Others suggest that the phrase refers to the time either slightly before or shortly after the siege of Jerusalem.

“Set thine house in order”: An instruction telling Hezekiah to make his final will known to his family (compare 2 Sam. 17:23).

“For thou shalt die, and not live”: The prediction sounded final, but Hezekiah knew God was willing to hear his appeal (Exodus 32:7-14).

We are not told the exact time of the illness of Hezekiah. Most scholars believe this happened about the middle of the reign of Hezekiah. Notice, his sickness was unto death. Even the prophet Isaiah warned Hezekiah, that he was about to die. This is a word from the LORD spoken through Isaiah, because he said "Thus saith the LORD".

Verses 2-3: “Prayed ... wept sore”: Hezekiah reminded the Lord in prayer of his piety and devotion to God. He did not specifically ask to be healed. Based on the interpretation of the date from verse 2, Hezekiah wept because:

1. He thought his death would give Sennacherib cause for boasting; or

2. His son Manasseh was too young to become king.

“Hezekiah” was sorrowful at Isaiah’s news (verse 1). However, he knew how to plead his case, for he was on praying terms with the Lord. His concern seems genuinely to be more for his country and its needs than for himself (verses 5-6).

Verses 2-6: Hezekiah was so quick to run to the Lord upon hearing Isaiah’s words that the prophet had barely left the king’s presence (20:4-5). Some form of “I have walked before thee” (literally, “before Your face”), is often used to describe the godly and righteous lives of men such as Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and David. “In truth speaks of reliability and stability.

2 Kings 20:2 "Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, saying,"

Either because the temple lay that way; or rather, that by turning his face from the company he might intimate his desire of privacy, and so might with more freedom and fervency pour out his soul to God.

This is a man who did not want to die. He possibly looked at the wall, so Isaiah, and whoever else was standing there, would not see his despair. His prayer is not for the benefit of those around him. He prayed directly to the LORD. To the unsaved world, facing death brings horror and uncertainty. To those who are saved, there may a dread of the initial death, but there is also an awareness of a life we can expect, after we step through the door of death to new life on the other side. There is a stepping into eternity.

2 Kings 20:3 "I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done [that which is] good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore."

Of this sickness of Hezekiah, the message of the prophet Isaiah to him, and his prayer upon it; (see Isa. 38:1-3).

“Perfect heart” (see note on Isa. 38:3).

Hezekiah's thoughts are somewhere between the two I mentioned above. He is not horrified at death, but yet he would like to live a little longer. Hezekiah is not bragging on himself. He is just reminding the LORD, that he had made a conscious effort to walk before Him with clean hands and a pure heart. The Hebrews associated long life on this earth, as something you received, when you pleased God. Hezekiah's weeping to me, indicates that he feels he might have not pleased the LORD in some way. All people, whether Christians or not, might weep at being told of their soon death. There is a certain uncertainty of dying, that all living feel.

2 Kings 20:4 "And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying,"

Of the king's palace, which is called the other court within the porch (1 Kings 7:8), so it is according to the marginal reading, which we follow. But the textual reading is, "the middle city"; Jerusalem was divided into three parts, and this was the middle part Isaiah was entering into: but before he did, so it was.

"That the word of the Lord came to him, saying": As follows in the next scripture.

The LORD hears the prayers of the righteous. The answer is so immediate, that Isaiah had not even left the building when the answer to Hezekiah's prayer comes to him.

2 Kings 20:5 "Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the LORD."

The king of them, as the Targum.

"Thus saith the Lord God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears": (Isa. 38:5).

"Behold, I will heal thee": Instantly, miraculously; and none but God could heal him. His disease being in its kind mortal, and he had been told from the Lord that he should die.

"On the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the Lord": The temple, to give thanks for his recovery; and this he should do on the third day from thence. So soon should he be well, which would show the cure to be miraculous.

The LORD stops Isaiah, and sends him back to Hezekiah with good news. Hezekiah is the leader of the people in more than civil matters. He is their spiritual leader, as well. He had caused the worship in the high places to stop. He had caused people to come back to the temple to meet with their LORD. Hezekiah was truly a great man. Hezekiah not only told people how to live, but showed them by example. His life, in many ways, reminds the LORD of King David. What a beautiful answer to his prayers. God had heard his words, and seen his weeping. He had touched the heart of the LORD, and God would heal him. Notice, there is something for Hezekiah to do, to show he had faith in the message from God. On the third day, he must go to the temple. Many times, the people were healed as they went where the LORD sent them.

2 Kings 20:6 "And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake."

"Fifteen years": The Lord's immediate (verse 4), response granted the king's request. Having to reverse a prophecy so quickly did not alarm Isaiah as it did Jonah later on (Jonah 4:2-3). Isaiah resembled Nathan in this respect (2 Sam. 7:3-6).

"I will defend this city" (see note on Isa. 38:6).

The sins of Judah, before Hezekiah became king, had greatly disappointed the LORD. Could it be that God was about to let the destruction come on Jerusalem? Perhaps, He had planned an early death for Hezekiah, so he would not see this destruction. When God answered Hezekiah's prayers, the city of Jerusalem also got a reprieve. Not only would God extend the life of Hezekiah, but he would delay the destruction of Jerusalem. God loved Hezekiah, but he also loved the city of Jerusalem, and David.

2 Kings 20:7 "And Isaiah said, Take a lump of figs. And they took and laid [it] on the boil, and he recovered."

“A lump of figs”: The application “of figs” to ulcerated sores is widely attested in the literature of the ancient world.

This shows God had a plan that, if carried out in faith, would heal Hezekiah. Figs, even today, are used by some people to cure boils. We would have to believe this boil was much more than just a boil, if it was about to kill Hezekiah. In this case, it is not the figs that healed Hezekiah, but the LORD. Putting on the figs was an act of faith. That was done in obedience to the LORD. The obedience of Hezekiah brought healing from the LORD.

Verses 8-11: “Sign ... back ten degrees”: Here is the first biblical mention of any means of marking time. Hezekiah requested this sign to confirm the Lord’s promise of healing. A “sign” is a physical event with a meaning that points beyond itself, and most often refers to an ordinary event with an extraordinary meaning implied. Unlike his father, Ahaz (Isa. 7:12), Hezekiah welcomed such signs.

2 Kings 20:8 "And Hezekiah said unto Isaiah, What [shall be] the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I shall go up into the house of the LORD the third day?"

“The third day” is often one of special spiritual experience and service (Exodus 19:11, 15; Ezra 6:15), as well as newness of life before God (compare Lev. 7:17 with Luke 13:32; 24-5-7, 21, 44-49; Acts 10:40; 1 Cor. 15:4).

In the days of the prophets, like Isaiah, it was not unusual for God to give them a sign. Hezekiah was not out of line in asking for a sign. Hezekiah was like many of us. He did not want to wait to see if God had answered his prayer. Three days was a long time to wait.

2 Kings 20:9 "And Isaiah said, This sign shalt thou have of the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that he hath spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees?"

Cure him of his disorder, so that he should be able to go to the temple on the third day.

“Shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees?” That is, the shadow of the sun on a dial plate; it was left to his option to choose which he would, as the confirming sign of his recovery.

This is a very unusual thing to happen. This would be an obvious sign that could not be denied.

2 Kings 20:10 "And Hezekiah answered, It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees: nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees."

That is, it was comparatively so, otherwise to go down ten degrees at once would be extraordinary and miraculous. But that was more agreeable to the nature and course of it to go forward, and so the miracle would be less apparent.

"Nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees": Which was directly contrary to its natural order and course, whereby the miracle would appear more clear and manifest.

Hezekiah had given a request for something that would be impossible in the natural sense. You must have an impossibility, before you can have a miracle. God is not controlled by nature. God controls everything, including nature.

2 Kings 20:11 "And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the LORD: and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz."

Evidently the supernatural turning “backward” of the sun’s “shadow” was a localized happening, but it was no less of a miracle.

I would not even attempt to rationalize this. I believe that it happened just as the Bible says, because the Bible says it did. Time actually backed up, but I do not know how it happened.

Verses 12-18: Hezekiah’s great faith is followed by a story of his foolishness. He was proud of the house of “his treasures” and recklessly showed them off to a foreign envoy. Now that the extent of Jerusalem’s wealth was known, Israel’s conquerors would one day carry it “all” off to Babylon” (Isa. 39:1-8).

2 Kings 20:12 "At that time Berodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah: for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick."

“At that time”: Just after Hezekiah’s sickness and recovery.

“Berodach-baladan”: Berodach-baladan, ruler of the city of Babylon, defied Assyria repeatedly between 721 and 710 B.C. He apparently approached Hezekiah (ca. 703 B.C.), for help against Sargon, king of Assyria, though interest in the reversal of the sundial (2 Chron. 32:31), and Hezekiah’s recovery may have been part of his motivation. “Berodach-baladan” is properly spelled Merodach-baladan (from the Babylonian Marduk Apal-Idinna, “Marduk Has Given a

Son”; in Isaiah 39:1). This Chaldean “king” had two periods of rule in “Babylon” (721-710 BC). And a short time (in 703 B.C.). Both periods were ended by Assyrian invasions. A perennial enemy of the Assyrians, Merodach-baladan constantly sought for allies to help in his resistance to Assyria.

Berodach-baladan is, also, spoken of as Merodach-baladan (in Isaiah chapter 39). The only thing that is known of Baladan, was that he was his father. It is unusual, that the story of the illness of Hezekiah had reached into Babylon. It is even more unusual for the king of Babylon to send the king of Judah a present, and a get well letter.

Verses 13-14: “Precious things ... treasures” (see notes on Isa. 39:2-3).

2 Kings 20:13 "And Hezekiah hearkened unto them, and showed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and [all] the house of his armor, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah showed them not."

“Hezekiah hearkened”: The text does not say whether it was because of flattery or out of a desire for help against the Assyrian threat (compare “pleased” in Isa. 39:2).

“Hezekiah” was carried away by his good fortune in recovering from illness and by the flattery of the ambassadors. For this prideful response, he was rebuked by Isaiah, who predicted that the information learned by the Babylonian embassy would contribute to Jerusalem’s eventual capture (verse 14-18).

Them in the verse above, is speaking of the messengers who brought the letter. We do not know if it was Hezekiah's fear of the Assyrians that caused him to want an alliance with the Babylonians. Babylon was a heathen country. Hezekiah should not yoke up with heathens. Hezekiah was being hospitable, when he showed them his house, and also the precious things the LORD had blessed him with. He might have been trying to convince them, that he would not be a burden on them, if they became allies. He showed them his armor and his ability to protect Judah.

2 Kings 20:14 "Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country, [even] from Babylon."

“Isaiah, with that fearless assumption of a superior position which we have noticed (in Isaiah 7), at once challenges the king to explain his conduct. Jehovah’s will is opposed to all coquetting with foreign powers (compare Isa. 30:1).

"From a far country": So the Assyrian kings describe Palestine as “a far off land,” using the same adjective.

Hezekiah had not sent for Isaiah. God was not pleased with what Hezekiah had done, and He sends Isaiah to tell him so. This is as if Isaiah was saying to Hezekiah, that this was a very foolish thing to do. Isaiah was asking Hezekiah, why he would show his secrets to men he did not even know? God would not want Hezekiah depending on these worldly people for help against Assyria. Isaiah was trying to get a confession of wrong doing from Hezekiah.

2 Kings 20:15 "And he said, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All [the things] that [are] in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not showed them."

I.e. what hast thou shewed them? Hast thou treated them like ordinary ambassadors, or hast thou gone out of thy way to court an alliance with their master?

"And Hezekiah answered, All the things that are in mine house have they seen": There is nothing among my treasures that I have not showed them. The reply is open and straightforward. Hezekiah is not ashamed of what he has done, or at any rate, will not, to escape blame, take refuge in lies or concealment. He readily acknowledges that he has shown the ambassadors everything.

Generally, someone who came to see the king from another country, would not be shown where the wealth of the land was kept. This was extremely unusual for the king to do this. This was like entertaining a future burglar, and giving him the combination to your safe. This was a very foolish thing to do.

Verses 16-17: Word of the Lord ... carried into Babylon": Isaiah predicted the Babylonian captivity that would come over a century later (586 B.C.), another prophecy historically fulfilled in all of its expected detail.

2 Kings 20:16 "And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the word of the LORD."

Hear what his judgment is of this, and how wide his thoughts are from thy thoughts! Thou was transported when the messengers of the king of Babylon arrived. To thy eye it appeared the most favorable conjuncture that could have happened to thee. Thou made a parade of all thy riches, and of thy armory, to induce them to enter into an alliance with thee against the king of Assyria. Thou thought if thou could secure their friendship and alliance, thou would be safe; even safer than in putting thy trust in the Lord God of Israel. But hear the word of the Lord; see the foolishness of thy thoughts: This very nation, in whom thou think to find security, is the nation that shall take away all these treasures, and carry away thy sons into captivity.

Isaiah had heard enough. Now he spoke judgment from God upon Hezekiah.

2 Kings 20:17 "Behold, the days come, that all that [is] in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD."

“Nothing shall be left”: Hezekiah’s sin of parading his wealth before the visitor’s backfired, though this sin was only symptomatic of the ultimate reason for the captivity. The major cause was the corrupt leadership of Manasseh, Hezekiah’s son (21:11-15).

Hezekiah had not ever quite realized that God was their help. They were not to make alliance for help from evil countries around them. The very opposite of what Hezekiah had wished would happen by showing them these things, would happen. They had seen the treasures, and that would cause them to want to overthrow Judah and take the treasures. Hezekiah's plan had backfired. Babylon would not ally with them, they would attack them.

2 Kings 20:18 "And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."

“Sons that shall issue from thee”: Hezekiah’s sons had to go into captivity (see 24:12-16; 2 Chron. 33:11; Dan. 1:3-4, 6), for the prophecy’s fulfillment.

Hezekiah's male descendants will not be married and produce descendants for Hezekiah. They will be made eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. We know of several that are mentioned specifically. Jehoiachin, Zedekiah, and Daniel were some of them. This was a terrible judgment especially to Jews, who wanted to be remembered in their children's children.

2 Kings 20:19 "Then said Hezekiah unto Isaiah, Good [is] the word of the LORD which thou hast spoken. And he said, [Is it] not [good], if peace and truth be in my days?"

“Hezekiah” responded in humility, sorrow, and thankfulness that the prophecy would be fulfilled in a time beyond his own.

“Word of the LORD ... good”: A surprising response to the negative prophecy of verses 16-18. It acknowledged Isaiah as God’s faithful messenger, and God’s goodness in not destroying Jerusalem during Hezekiah’s lifetime.

“Peace and truth be in my days”: Hezekiah might have reacted selfishly, or perhaps he looked for a bright spot to lighten the gloomy fate of his descendants.

Hezekiah realizes he had displeased the LORD. He accepted the punishment that God spoke through Isaiah. Even though the LORD was angered by what Hezekiah had done, He remembered that Hezekiah truly loved Him in his heart. He was merciful to Hezekiah in that he did not live to see this happen. During the life of Hezekiah, Judah would be relatively peaceful.

2 Kings 20:20 "And the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and all his might, and how he made a pool, and a conduit, and brought water into the city, [are] they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?"

The “conduit of “water” would provide a ready water supply within the “City” walls during the predicted siege of Jerusalem (2 Chron. 32:30). Confirmation of this great engineering feat came with the discovery of a 1,777 foot long water shaft between the spring of Gihon and the “pool”

of Siloam. An inscription found near the Siloam side tells of the excitement of the workers on the project, who worked from opposite ends, as they drew near to one another (see note on 2 Chron. 32:30).

The pool mentioned here, had to be of exceptional, since it is spoken of as the pool. This pool was probably the same as the pool of Siloam. The conduit was a way to bring water into Jerusalem. There was a well in the Kidron valley, which the water was funneled through this conduit into the pool of Siloam. The conduit discovered, which this most assuredly is speaking of, is 1,708 feet long. At places it is as small as two feet tall and it is as large as five feet tall in other places. This would have been a great feat for that day. There is still evidence in Jerusalem today of this type of water system. The book of chronicles, mentioned here, is again the book of records of the king. This is speaking of civil records.

2 Kings 20:21 "And Hezekiah slept with his fathers: and Manasseh his son reigned in his stead."

Died, as they did. No mention is here made of the place of his burial, but there is (in 2 Chronicles 32:33), where he is said to be buried in the principal part of the sepulchers of the sons of David. And to have honor done him at his death by the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem, by the vast concourse of people attending his interment, and by burning spices for him, and making a public mourning on his account a certain stated time.

"And Manasseh his son reigned in his stead": Of whose wicked reign and account is given in the next chapter.

We must remember again, that Hezekiah stood out from the other kings, in that he wanted to please God. His son Manasseh will not follow in his father's footsteps. He will be very evil. Hezekiah was buried near his ancestor David in a place of honor.

2 Kings Chapter 20 Questions

1. How sick was Hezekiah?
2. Who came with a message from God to Isaiah?
3. When do most scholars believe the sickness of Hezekiah occurred?
4. Why did Hezekiah turn and face the wall?
5. What did Hezekiah remind the LORD of in his prayer?
6. What did his weeping indicate?
7. How quickly did God answer Hezekiah?

8. What was the good news Isaiah had for Hezekiah?
9. What was Hezekiah to do, on the third day after seeing Isaiah?
10. What good thing had Hezekiah done for the land?
11. How many years extra did God give Hezekiah?
12. The extension of Hezekiah's life was not all that God did. What did He do for Jerusalem?
13. What were they to put on the boil?
14. What sign would be given, so that he would know he was healed?
15. Who was king of Babylon at this time?
16. Who did Hezekiah show everything he had to?
17. Why did Hezekiah do this?
18. What question did Isaiah ask Hezekiah about this?
19. In verse 16, what was Isaiah about to speak?
20. Who would someday carry off all the precious things of Judah?
21. What would happen to Hezekiah's sons?
22. Who were some of the famous eunuchs?
23. How did Hezekiah accept the punishment?
24. What was the pool mentioned in verse 20?
25. What is a conduit?