

What do you make of Hezekiah’s “there will be peace and security in my days”?

I think most people find it rather selfish and disturbing.

What about your children!? Your grandchildren?!

In September of 1938, the British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain,

announced that he had entered into a treaty with Germany,

resolving “the Czechoslovakian problem”

(Germany had taken over part of Czechoslovakia,

and Chamberlain hoped that a policy of appeasement

would contain Hitler)

Chamberlain declared that he believed that the Munich agreement would provide  
“peace for our time.”

A year later, Germany invaded Poland, launching World War II.

We tend to laugh at the Chamberlains – and the Hezekiahs –

who seem to be blithely indifferent to their offspring,

so long as we have peace for *our time!*

But how long has peace ever lasted?

Chamberlain was actually quoting from an earlier Prime Minister,

Benjamin Disraeli who had gone to German in the 1870s,

and managed to achieve a peace that lasted for 40 years!

Forty years.

How often has a region seen peace for more than 40 years?

The United States is an oddity in human history.

It has been 150 years since we have seen a full-fledged war on this continent.

For most parts of the world, to go for a generation without war was impressive!

And especially in the light of the Assyrian invasion,

one could forgive Hezekiah for expressing such relief!

Because – as we’ll see – the Assyrian invasion hadn’t happened yet!

## 1. The Sickness of the House of David (38:1-8)

### a. Thus Says the LORD: You Shall Die (v1)

*38 In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him, and said to him, “Thus says the LORD: Set your house in order, for you shall die, you shall not recover.”*

“At that time”

Or around that time—because this happened prior to the events of chapters 36-37.

The invasion of Sennacherib and the destruction of the Assyrian army  
recounted in 36-37 can be clearly dated to 701 B.C.

Merodach-Baladan of Babylon mounted his attack on Assyria in 705-703,  
and in 702 he was looking for western allies against Assyria.

Indeed, Sennacherib’s invasion was in part retaliation for Hezekiah’s  
dabbling with the Babylonian rebels.

(Merodach-Baladan had rebelled against Sargon II of Assyria in 722 –  
but Sargon had defeated him in 710 and he fled.

Merodach-Baladan rebelled again in 705, after the death of Sargon,  
but Sennacherib moved quickly, and in 703, Merodach-Baladan fled again.

So the story of Merodach-Baladan’s emissaries must come from 703 –  
probably around 18 months before Sennacherib’s siege.)

This fits very well with the text of Isaiah –  
since God promises Hezekiah 15 years more of life –  
and Isaiah dies about 687 B.C.

But Isaiah switches the stories around,  
telling us of the Assyrian attack first,  
and then telling us about the Babylonian envoy.

The stories are told in the same order in 2 Kings 18-20,  
suggesting that Isaiah’s order had become canonical by the time of the exile.

Why does Isaiah do this?

Chapters 36-37 conclude the first section of his prophecy.  
They neatly deal with the Assyrian threat, leaving no loose ends.  
But history always has loose ends.

While Assyria will no longer trouble Judah,  
a new power is rising in the east.

Babylon.

The second half of Isaiah’s prophecy will deal with the Babylonian world,  
and so Isaiah dischronologizes the coming of the Babylonian envoys  
in order to set up his promise of the restoration from exile.

Alec Motyer calls this second part of Isaiah “the book of the Servant.”  
Just as chapters 1-37 focus on the king—the son of David,  
even so chapters 38-55 focus on the Servant of the Lord.

In Kings and Chronicles Hezekiah is portrayed as a faithful king,

a reformer who restored the worship of Yahweh.  
Isaiah shows us another side of this king.  
This son of David was fickle.  
He was self-centered.  
He was a lot like us--  
    too much like us, in fact.  
And his failure reminds us that we need a king—we need a son of David—  
    who will keep his eyes fixed on the glory of God,  
    and not his own glory.

Last week we saw Hezekiah at his best.  
His prayer for deliverance was a model of what prayer should be.  
In the midst of trial he desired the glory of the name of Yahweh to be revealed.

But at the beginning of chapter 38, probably around a year or so before the siege of Assyria,  
Hezekiah is sick to the point of death.  
This is representative of the whole house of David.  
Isaiah's ministry began in the year king Uzziah died (chapter 6),  
    and spoke of the year that king Ahaz died (14:28),  
    and now it will conclude with the death of Hezekiah.  
Thus says Yahweh:  
    “Set your house in order, for you shall die, you shall not recover.”

Hezekiah—and the whole house of David—is sick to the point of death.  
Hezekiah's father became a vassal of Assyria,  
    and now Hezekiah is about to pay for his father's sins.  
Assyria is coming.  
But Hezekiah does not accept the word of the LORD as the final word.  
Like Abraham and Moses before him,  
    he pleads with God to reverse his decision.  
And God does.

**b. Hezekiah's Prayer: Remember My Faithfulness (v2-3)**  
<sup>2</sup> Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD,  
This must force us to ask a couple of questions:  
First, what right does Hezekiah have to say to the Holy One of Israel,  
    “No, don't do that!”  
Well, he is the Meshiach.  
He is the anointed one—the son of David—  
    who rules over all things for the honor of the name of Yahweh.  
He has the right to come before the Holy One of Israel and plead his case.  
    And notice how he does it: (verse 3)

<sup>3</sup> and said, “Please, O LORD, remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

Hezekiah reminds God that he has walked in truth—in faithfulness to God’s word.

He has been a faithful king—the best in Judah since David himself.

He has restored true worship and has led the people in God’s ways.

At least mostly.

When he says that he has walked before God with a whole heart,  
that means that he has not wavered from his worship of the true God.

And we see in God’s response that he is satisfied with Hezekiah.

**c. Thus Says the LORD: I Have Heard Your Prayer – I Will Deliver You and This City (v4-6)**

<sup>4</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: <sup>5</sup> “Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will add fifteen years to your life.”<sup>[b]</sup>

Identifying himself as “the God of David your father,”

Yahweh declares that he has heard Hezekiah’s prayer and seen his tears.

And he promises that he will add fifteen years to Hezekiah’s life.

And in giving Hezekiah new life, he will also spare his people, and his city.

(Read v6)

<sup>6</sup> I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and will defend this city.

Hezekiah, together with the whole people of Judah, deserves death.

But God will turn back the clock and have mercy on them.

And as a sign of this,

God has the shadow of the sun turn back ten steps on the sundial of Ahaz.

God turns back the clock literally, as a sign of what he will do for Hezekiah,

**d. The Sign of the Shadow Moving Back (v7-8)**

<sup>7</sup> This shall be the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do this thing that he has promised: <sup>8</sup> Behold, I will make the shadow cast by the declining sun on the dial of Ahaz turn back ten steps.” So the sun turned back on the dial the ten steps by which it had declined.

So is this works-righteousness?

Is God rewarding Hezekiah according to his works?

No and yes.

It is not works-righteousness, but God is rewarding Hezekiah according to his works.

And there is a difference between those two things!

Both Hezekiah and Jerusalem deserve death and destruction.

That much is already clear from Isaiah 1-37.  
So this is plainly an act of grace by which God will deliver his people.  
Hezekiah does not attain to righteousness by works.  
And yet, Hezekiah is the anointed Son of David.  
Inasmuch as he is a type of Christ,  
    he is called to be the righteous king who leads his people in God's ways.  
    And so when he does what is good, he brings salvation to his people.  
In effect, God is rewarding Hezekiah's righteousness,  
    even though Hezekiah's righteousness falls far short of God's holy standard.  
He graciously rewards him for his works, even as he forgives his sins.

Our confession puts it this way:  
The persons of believers being accepted through Christ,  
    their good works also are accepted in him;  
not as though they were in this life wholly unblamable and unreprovable in God's sight;  
but that he, looking upon them in his Son,  
    is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere,  
    although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections. (16.6)

God accepts and rewards the sincere good works of the believer,  
    not because we have earned his favor,  
    but because he has promised that he will do so.

## 2. The Song of Hezekiah (38:9-22)

<sup>9</sup> A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, after he had been sick and had recovered from his sickness:

Hezekiah's response, predictably, is one of gratitude.  
He had despaired of life.  
When God had said, "you shall die,"  
    Hezekiah declared, "what shall I say?  
        For he has spoken to me, and he himself has done it."

### a. Consigned to Sheol in the Midst of Days (v10-13)

<sup>10</sup> I said, In the middle<sup>[d]</sup> of my days  
    I must depart;  
I am consigned to the gates of Sheol  
    for the rest of my years.  
<sup>11</sup> I said, I shall not see the LORD,  
    the LORD in the land of the living;  
I shall look on man no more  
    among the inhabitants of the world.  
<sup>12</sup> My dwelling is plucked up and removed from me  
    like a shepherd's tent;

*like a weaver I have rolled up my life;  
he cuts me off from the loom;  
from day to night you bring me to an end;  
<sup>13</sup> I calmed myself<sup>e</sup> until morning;  
like a lion he breaks all my bones;  
from day to night you bring me to an end.*

Verses 10-13 portray Hezekiah's impending death as his entrance into the grave –  
into Sheol –  
departing from the land of the living.

And yet Hezekiah plainly sees that Sheol is a place where one can spend "the rest of my years."  
The grave is a place – a realm – but it is a realm where one *cannot* see the LORD.  
It is the realm of the dead – and death means separation from God –  
entering the realm of God's wrath and curse.

(read 14-15)

**b. And the Lord Has Done This (v14-15)**

*<sup>14</sup> Like a swallow or a crane I chirp;  
I moan like a dove.  
My eyes are weary with looking upward.  
O Lord, I am oppressed; be my pledge of safety!  
<sup>15</sup> What shall I say? For he has spoken to me,  
and he himself has done it.  
I walk slowly all my years  
because of the bitterness of my soul.*

There are many echoes here of Psalm 102.

Either Psalm 102 reflects Hezekiah's prayer –  
or Hezekiah had often meditated on Psalm 102,  
and so his prayer echoes that beautiful lament!

But at the heart of Hezekiah's complaint is that *God himself has done this*.  
In one sense, the sovereignty of God makes it worse:  
God himself has put me here!  
But there is another way in which the sovereignty of God brings comfort:  
If God has put me here,  
then that means I can appeal to *him* to do something about it!!

And that's where Hezekiah goes in verse 16:

**c. Life vs. Sheol – Health vs. the Pit (v16-19)**

*<sup>16</sup> O Lord, by these things men live,  
and in all these is the life of my spirit.*

*Oh restore me to health and make me live!*

But now that God has spared his life,  
Hezekiah rejoices, admitting that

<sup>17</sup> Behold, it was for my welfare  
that I had great bitterness;  
but in love you have delivered my life  
from the pit of destruction,  
for you have cast all my sins  
behind your back.

All things—whether trials or temptations—  
work together for the good of those who love God,  
who are called according to his purpose.  
And now God has forgiven his sins and rewarded his sincere good works.

Indeed, Hezekiah is a perfect example of what the Confession speaks of,  
because Hezekiah's good works are full of imperfections.

No one could ever claim that Hezekiah earned God's grace through his prayer.  
But God is merciful and gracious and rewards even our imperfect works.  
They do not merit the forgiveness of sins or the gift of eternal life,  
but as with Hezekiah, they are rewarded with God's favor and lovingkindness.

In contrast:

<sup>18</sup> For Sheol does not thank you;  
death does not praise you;  
those who go down to the pit do not hope  
for your faithfulness.

What does this mean: “those who go down to the pit do not hope for your faithfulness”?

Hope only exists where there is life.  
Where there is life, there is hope.

Once you are dead, there is no hope.

This is related to the point that Hebrews makes –  
“it is appointed for man to die once, and then judgment.”  
The land of the living is where faith, hope, and love are exercised.  
Those who wait in Sheol are simply waiting.

<sup>19</sup> The living, the living, he thanks you,  
as I do this day;  
the father makes known to the children

*your faithfulness.*

God is true to his word.

And therefore Hezekiah has hope for the future.

**d. The LORD Will Save Me – and We Will Play Music in His House (v20)**

<sup>20</sup> *The LORD will save me,  
and we will play my music on stringed instruments  
all the days of our lives,  
at the house of the LORD.*

Hezekiah speaks all this as one who is a father to his people.

As the Son of David, he is the king of Israel.

And he makes known to his children—to his people—the faithfulness of God,  
through teaching them his songs.

Verse 20 declares (read)

Stephen Pribble has suggested that this verse

shows that OT Israel sang uninspired hymns in worship.

The term “play my music” is the verbal form of the noun “stringed instruments.”

It is found 14 times in the OT, seven times as the title of a psalm.

So Hezekiah is saying that his music would be played at the house of the LORD.

We are never told of any canonical psalms written by Hezekiah,

so it appears that uninspired songs were sung and played in the temple,  
with the full endorsement of Isaiah.

The point for us is that we should rejoice and give thanks to God for his salvation.

And it is entirely appropriate that the people of God should write music

that expresses that thanks in every generation.

The canonical psalms should form the foundation of any hymnal,

and then we should add psalms and hymns from every generation,  
so that we give thanks with all the saints in heaven and on earth.

I wish we could stop there.

For Hezekiah’s sake, I could wish that chapter 39 had never been written.

But for your sakes, I am glad that we may hear of the failure of Hezekiah.

Because we too must learn that the people of God only come to Zion through Babylon.

**e. The Sign of Hezekiah’s Recovery (v21-22)**

<sup>21</sup> *Now Isaiah had said, “Let them take a cake of figs and apply it to the boil, that he may recover.”* <sup>22</sup> *Hezekiah also had said, “What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the LORD?”*

**3. The Coming of Babylon (39:1-8)**

**a. The Envoys from Babylon (v1-4)**

*39 At that time Merodach-baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent envoys with letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that he had been sick and had recovered.<sup>2</sup> And Hezekiah welcomed them gladly. And he showed them his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his whole armory, all that was found in his storehouses. There was nothing in his house or in all his realm that Hezekiah did not show them.<sup>3</sup> Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah, and said to him, “What did these men say? And from where did they come to you?” Hezekiah said, “They have come to me from a far country, from Babylon.”<sup>4</sup> He said, “What have they seen in your house?” Hezekiah answered, “They have seen all that is in my house. There is nothing in my storehouses that I did not show them.”*

Because Merodach-Baladan sent envoys with letters to Hezekiah,  
congratulating him on his recovery.  
And Hezekiah welcomed them gladly,  
thinking, perhaps, that Babylon would be a useful ally against Assyria.

Let us not be too harsh with Hezekiah.  
Would we have done any better?  
Hezekiah might have thought, “well, but God does use means to accomplish his ends;  
perhaps Babylon will be God’s means for defending us from Assyria!”  
Yes, God had warned against foreign alliances,  
and perhaps Hezekiah sought to follow the letter of the law—  
because it does not say that Hezekiah entered into an alliance with Babylon—  
merely that he showed them everything in his storehouses and his whole realm.  
He did not violate the letter of the law, perhaps,  
but plainly he was attempting to convince Merodach-Baladan  
that Judah would be friendly toward any rebellion that Babylon had in mind.

But Isaiah caught wind of the envoys’ visit.  
And he smelled a rat.  
So he went to the king and asked, “What did these men say?  
And from where did they come to you?”  
And when he learned that they were from Babylon, he asked, “what have they seen?”  
Everything.

Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah,  
(Read 5-7)

#### **b. The Exile to Babylon (v5-7)**

*<sup>5</sup> Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the LORD of hosts: <sup>6</sup> Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the LORD. <sup>7</sup> And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.”*

All that you fear regarding Assyria is a phantom.  
God will strike them down, and he will preserve his city from their attacks.

But Babylon?  
Babylon will come and plunder all that “your fathers have stored up till this day.”  
Even your own sons will serve the king of Babylon as eunuchs.

And Hezekiah—who had grieved when his own death was foretold—  
now smiles and says, “The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good.”  
Hey, there will be peace and security on my watch!

### c. “Peace in Our Time” (v8)

<sup>8</sup> Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good.” For he thought, “There will be peace and security in my days.”

I suppose it depends on your perspective.

Hezekiah feared that Judah would be overthrown in a matter of months,  
and here Isaiah has promised him 15 years,  
and now says that destruction will not come for at least another generation.

That’s good news!

And in a way, it was.

He had grown up hearing Isaiah prophesying the end of the northern kingdom,  
and as his teenage years came to an end, he watched Isaiah’s word come true.  
Now as king, for the last fifteen years, he has heard Isaiah preaching the end of Judah.

God’s judgment is coming upon Judah and Jerusalem  
for their refusal to walk in his ways.

Isaiah has subtly, carefully, but no less clearly,  
condemned his own conduct in foreign affairs.

He knows that God’s prophet is not pleased with the Egyptian alliance,  
and he has sat through six sermons on the “woes” to those who trust in Egypt,  
none of which name him—but all of which speak directly to him.

He fears that he will be the last of the house of David,  
and so when he hears that the judgment will not come yet,  
he breathes a sigh of relief.

Perhaps he even hopes that this will give his reforms time to work.  
Maybe if his sons improve upon his efforts,  
maybe God will relent and bring prosperity to Zion.

If there is life, there is hope!

But Isaiah himself will show us a very different attitude,  
which we will now turn to in Isaiah 40-66.  
Isaiah will spend no time calling Judah to repent.  
It’s too late.

Babylon is coming.  
They will finish the job that Assyria started.  
They will carry you off to exile.  
There is nothing more to be said or done.  
Babylon is coming.

So instead, Isaiah turns to preparing Judah and Jerusalem for the restoration.  
“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God...”

God is not interested in simply providing a temporary peace –  
a peace that lasts for a generation or so!

God is bringing true *shalom* – the peace of his kingdom will endure forever!

Are you settling for “peace in your time”?  
Are you fixing your hope on the next 15 years?  
What if the next 15 years don’t go as you hope?

Whose peace are you concerned with?  
Are you just focused on your own happiness?  
Or do you seek the peace and happiness of the heavenly city?

Set your hearts and minds on things above – not on earthly things –  
for you died, and your life is now hid with Christ in God –  
and when Christ, who is your life, appears –  
you also will appear with him in glory!