

The Prophecies of Isaiah ⁵⁵

Lesson 24

The Bible contains two records of the events in Isaiah 38 and 39. The matching record is found in Second Kings 20 which is traditionally attributed to the writings of Jeremiah who began his ministry and work in 627 BC, 85 years after this event. The majority of the two records are in the same order; however, Jeremiah's record seems to offer the most logical explanation. Nevertheless, Isaiah's record contains the actual prayer of Hezekiah which the Lord hears and therefore grants him 15 more years of life. For convenience, the two records are set side by side in this lesson.

712 BC - Hezekiah's Sickness – Historical Record

History/Isaiah's Eye Witness Account

ISAIAH'S VISIT – SET HOUSE IN ORDER

Isaiah 38:1 In those days Hezekiah became mortally ill. 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 and not live.'"

2 Kings 20:1 In those days Hezekiah became mortally ill. 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 and not live.'"

The words "In those days" refer to the days while Sennacherib's men are still outside the wall of Jerusalem and before the Angel of the Lord destroys 185,000 of the Assyrian troops causing the Assyrian king to return to Nineveh, an event which sets the Southern Kingdom free from oppression during the remaining days of Hezekiah's reign.

The events recorded in Isaiah 36 and 37 do not occur quickly. The build up of the siege on Jerusalem literally takes weeks to transpire. It takes at least three days for General Rabshakeh to move his troops to Jerusalem. Rabshakeh taunts Jerusalem and Hezekiah for several days until the king's messengers arrive to meet with Rabshakeh. It takes two days for Rabshakeh to travel from Jerusalem to Libnah where he finds Sennacherib. Eventually, Rabshakeh sends men back to Jerusalem with his letter to Hezekiah requiring at least two more days. We do not know how many days pass before Sennacherib and Rabshakeh finally join the camp outside Jerusalem but it is safe to assume that it takes more than a week to complete the details at Libnah and Lachish and move all the troops to the new site.

Some time in the midst of Hezekiah's trouble with the king of Assyria, Hezekiah becomes mortally ill because of a boil described in Isaiah 38:21. Today, we think nothing of a boil, but in Hezekiah's day, a boil which became infected was almost always deadly. Placing the time of Hezekiah's illness in the story of Isaiah 36 & 37 is difficult; however, it surely transpires prior to Isaiah's delivery of the promise found in Isaiah 37:33 that Sennacherib will "not come to this city, or shoot an arrow there; neither shall he come before it with a shield, nor throw up a mound against it." While Rabshakeh is trying to find his king in Lachish, Isaiah delivers the message to Hezekiah to get his house in order because he is going to die from his illness.

⁵⁵ ALL SCRIPTURES IN THIS LESSON ENTITLED "THE Prophecies of Isaiah" ARE TAKEN FROM THE NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE, COPYRIGHT (C) 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1988, BY THE LOCKMAN FOUNDATION. USED BY PERMISSION.

History/Isaiah's Eye Witness Account

HEZEKIAH'S PRAYER

Isaiah 38:2 Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall, and prayed to the LORD, ³ and said, "Remember now, O LORD, I beseech Thee, how I have walked before Thee in truth and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in Thy sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

2 Kings 20:2 Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed to the LORD, saying, ³ "Remember now, O LORD, I beseech Thee, how I have walked before Thee in truth and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in Thy sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

It is 712 BC. Hezekiah is 39 years old and he does not want to die.⁵⁶ The news from Isaiah grieves the king bitterly and he turns his head away from the prophet and prays to the Lord while facing the wall. The answer to Hezekiah's prayer is so significant that he records his prayer which is included in Isaiah 38:9-20.

History/Isaiah's Eye Witness Account

ISAIAH'S VISIT – FIFTEEN YEARS TO LIFE

Isaiah 38:4 Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah, saying, ⁵ "Go and say to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of your father David, "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, 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; and I will defend this city.'"

2 Kings 20:4 And it came about before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying, ⁵ "Return and say to Hezekiah the leader of My people, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of your father David, " I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD. ⁶ "And I will add fifteen years to your life, and I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake and for My servant David's sake.'"

After hearing Hezekiah's prayer, the Lord sends Isaiah back to the king to inform him that he will not die, that he will live 15 more years and that the Assyrian king will not take the city of Jerusalem. This promise provides the impetus which causes Hezekiah to confidently assure the city people that they will be safe within the walls of the city; therefore, this event probably occurs before Rabshakeh asks the following questions:

"What is this confidence that you have? "I say, 'Your counsel and strength for the war are only empty words.' Now on whom do you rely, that you have rebelled against me?" Isaiah 36:4-5.

Because the Lord promises to defend the city for His sake and for the sake of his servant David, Hezekiah has full confidence in Jerusalem's future in light of Assyria's threat.

At this junction in the story, Second Kings differs from Isaiah's record. Jeremiah records the following.

⁵⁶ Hezekiah was 25 years old when he became king of the Southern Kingdom. 2 Chronicles 29:1

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

This passage is included in Isaiah 38:21 but follows the sign and Hezekiah's prayer. It seems to be out place here because Hezekiah's request for a sign that proves his healing must come before the healing; although, the instruction to use the fig cake may belong here, its actual use may take place after the sign. However, there is a difference in the wording. Jeremiah's record implies that he is healed by the fig cake whereas Isaiah's account implies that the cake is to be applied in the hope that it will bring about a cure.

Jeremiah's account also differs in the timing of Hezekiah's asking Isaiah for a sign.

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

Jeremiah's record includes Hezekiah's request for a sign at this point in the story rather than at the end as in Isaiah. It makes more sense that the request for a sign properly belongs in this place as Jeremiah records. What will be the sign that Hezekiah will be healed and allowed to go to the Temple three days later? Isaiah reveals the sign and together they watch it happen.

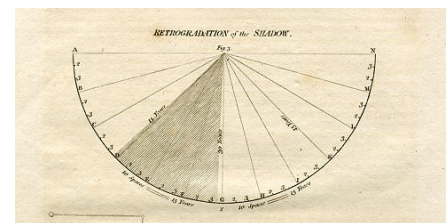
History/Isaiah's Eye Witness Account

ISAIAH'S VISIT – SIGN OF SHADOW ON STAIRWAY

Isaiah 38:7 "And this shall be the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do this thing that He has spoken: **8** "Behold, I will cause the shadow on the stairway, which has gone down with the sun on the stairway of Ahaz, to go back ten steps." So the sun's *shadow* went back ten steps on the stairway on which it had gone down.

2 Kings 20:9 And Isaiah said, " This shall be the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that He has spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten steps or go back ten steps?" **10** So Hezekiah answered, "It is easy for the shadow to decline ten steps; no, but let the shadow turn backward ten steps." **11** And Isaiah the prophet cried to the LORD, and He brought the shadow on the stairway back ten steps by which it had gone down on the stairway of Ahaz.

Many scholars think that the stairway of Ahaz could be seen outside the window of the personal residence of the king in Jerusalem; however, that notion is unsubstantiated. Furthermore, some scholars believe that Ahaz borrowed a stair-sundial design for a from the Old Babylonian community. The Babylonians had divided the daylight hours into twelve parts and designed a staircase that indicated the time of day by the placement of the shadow from its stylus. The day began about 6:00 AM with the shadow of the stylus on the first and highest step. The day ended at 6:00 PM when the shadow passed the last step and the rest of the steps were fully exposed to the sun just before sunset when night officially began year round. For the shadow to move back down the stairs 10 steps means that the miracle occurs between 4:00 PM and 6:00 PM. If it is as early as 4:00 PM, the new time for the day is 6:00 AM. If the miracle occurs as late as 6:00 PM, the new time for the day is 10:00 AM. The miracle is so spectacular that many nations send envoys to Jerusalem to investigate the event.



History/Isaiah's Eye Witness Account

HEZEKIAH'S PRAYER THAT THE LORD ANSWERS

Isaiah 38:9 A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, after his illness and recovery: ¹⁰ I said, "In the middle of my life I am to enter the gates of Sheol; I am to be deprived of the rest of my years." ¹¹ 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. ¹² "Like a shepherd's tent my dwelling is pulled up and removed from me; As a weaver I rolled up my life. He cuts me off from the loom; From day until night Thou dost make an end of me. ¹³ "I composed *my soul* until morning. Like a lion-- so He breaks all my bones, From day until night Thou dost make an end of me. ¹⁴ " Like a swallow, *like* a crane, so I twitter; I moan like a dove; My eyes look wistfully to the heights; O Lord, I am oppressed, be my security. ¹⁵ " What shall I say? For He has spoken to me, and He Himself has done it; I shall wander about all my years because of the bitterness of my soul. ¹⁶ "O Lord, by *these things men* live; And in all these is the life of my spirit; O restore me to health, and let me live! ¹⁷ "Lo, for *my own* welfare I had great bitterness; It is Thou who hast kept my soul from the pit of nothingness, For Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back. ¹⁸ "For Sheol cannot thank Thee, Death cannot praise Thee; Those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Thy faithfulness. ¹⁹ "It is the living who give thanks to Thee, as I do today; A father tells his sons about Thy faithfulness. ²⁰ "The LORD will surely save me; So we will play my songs on stringed instruments All *the* days of our life at the house of the LORD."

After Hezekiah recovers from his illness, he sees fit to record the prayer he uttered when he turned his face toward the wall and cried out to the Lord. Most of the kings of the Southern kingdom lived to 70 years of age or beyond; Hezekiah is just 39 years old, theoretically in the middle of his life as the king. Isaiah has told him he will die and the prophet has never been wrong in his prophecies in 43 years. Why would the prophet be wrong in this prophecy to Hezekiah? Yet, Hezekiah, in his sickness, cries out to the Lord, holding nothing back. The king asks the Lord for healing knowing that whether he lives or dies, the Lord has forgiven his sins and cast them behind His back.

History/Isaiah's Eye Witness Account

ISAIAH'S HEALING REMEDY

Isaiah 38:21 Now Isaiah had said, "Let them take a cake of figs, and apply it to the boil, that he may recover."

Isaiah is there to provide an answer from the Lord because He has heard the prayer of the king. The Lord prescribes a fig cake to be placed on the boil to draw out the poison. Fig cakes can be found throughout the Old Testament canon as sources of food. The figs were gathered when ripe, peeled, pressed into cake molds and then allowed to dry completely, allowing them to be saved indefinitely until the next crop of figs was available. Prior to this instruction, the only remedy for boils is found in the Book of Job in which he uses pieces of broken pottery to scrape the sores and then covers them with ashes to draw the moisture from the skin and keep the area dry. Any moisture in the sore would allow for the growth of deadly bacteria introduced from any number of sources. The fig cake remedy is found only in the two accounts of this story in the Bible; therefore, it cannot be considered as a common cure for boils. In any case, Hezekiah's use of the dry fig cake facilitates the cure of Hezekiah's mortal boil.

History/Isaiah's Eye Witness Account

HEZEKIAH ASKS FOR A SIGN

Isaiah 38:22 Then Hezekiah had said, "What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the LORD?"

Why Isaiah places the question about the sign here is not known. Jeremiah's record in Second Kings seems to be the correct placement of the question before the revelation of the shadow on the steps.

Hezekiah's Folly – Historical Record

History/Isaiah's Eye Witness Account

LETTERS FROM MERIDACH-BALADAN – KING OF BABYLON

Isaiah 39:1 At that time Merodach-baladan son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that he had been sick and had recovered.

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

The news of Hezekiah's sickness and the miracle that accompanies his healing and recovery spreads across the world. The king of Babylon sends congratulatory letters to Hezekiah with an envoy of men.

Is the king's name Merodach or Berodach? This conflict is a copy error. His formal name as king was Merodach. The **mem** was accidentally changed to a **beth** on copies and remains in the NASB version; many other versions have corrected the error.

In chronological time, Merodach-baladan is the first king of Babylon mentioned in the Bible. He was installed in the Babylonian area by the king of Assyria as a viceroy in 721 BC but he rebelled and called himself King of Babylon until his removal in 710 BC. It is during this time that he sends messengers to congratulate Hezekiah for his miraculous recovery. It is his attempt to garner the support of the Southern Kingdom against Assyria. In 705 BC, when Sargon II dies, Merodach revolts against Sennecherib and finally claims the throne again to reign for part of two years from 703 - 702 BC. He flees for safety from Sennacherib to the country of Elam but continues his efforts to claim Babylon as a nation free of Assyria.

History/Isaiah's Eye Witness Account

MERIDACH-BALADAN MEN TOUR TREASURY

Isaiah 39:2 And Hezekiah was pleased, and showed them all his treasure house, the silver and the gold and the spices and the precious oil and his whole armory and all that was found in his treasuries. There was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah did not show them.

2 Kings 20:13 And Hezekiah listened to them, and showed them all his treasure house, the silver and the gold and the spices and the precious oil and the house of his armor and all that was found in his treasuries. There was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah did not show them.

Hezekiah enjoys the attention from Merodach's men and proudly shows off all he owns. By this time, Hezekiah has full assurance that Assyria will not attack him again, facilitating his willingness to enter into a relationship with Merodach who has successfully separated Babylon from Sargon and Sennacherib for a time.

History/Isaiah's Eye Witness Account

ISAIAH'S QUESTIONS TO HEZEKIAH

Isaiah 39:3a Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah and said to him, "What did these men say, and from where have they come to you

2 Kings 20:14a Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah and said to him, "What did these men say, and from where have they come to you?" And

And Hezekiah said, "They have come to me from a far country, from Babylon."?" ⁴ And he said, "What have they seen in your house?" So Hezekiah answered, "They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them."

Hezekiah said, "They have come from a far country, from Babylon." ¹⁵ And he said, "What have they seen in your house?" ¹⁵ So Hezekiah answered, "They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them."

Wise Isaiah is worried. He hears of Babylon's visit and wants Hezekiah to tell him of their intentions. Hezekiah has shown them everything and Isaiah uses the king's mistake to proclaim his final prophecy. It is directed to Hezekiah and it extends from Isaiah 39:5 to 66:24. The Assyrians have returned to their country and they will not be part of the Southern Kingdom's history again. Assyria will be mentioned only one more time in Isaiah 52:4 as a reference to Israel's oppression of the past but Vision 22 says nothing about Assyria's ever coming against the Southern Kingdom again.