

King Hezekiah: The later years

[2 Kings 20](#). Read also Isaiah [38](#) and [39](#) and [2 Chronicles 32](#): 24-33.

Part 1) Hezekiah's illness and healing

Hezekiah became ill and near death and Isaiah told him he would die. Hezekiah was about 39 years old when this happened.

Hezekiah turns to the wall to pray, possibly in an attempt to be private with God, and weeps bitterly. Hezekiah reminds God of his faithfulness and asks to be healed. It sounds very transactional but, in a culture where illness and health were often seen as curses or blessings from God, Hezekiah's prayer changes. For example, [Leviticus 26](#) and [Deuteronomy 28](#) outline how blessings and curses are given according to obedience. The guarantee of God's love through faith was only made clear because of Jesus and having faith in Jesus. In Hezekiah's time, this illness seemed like God was displeased with him for some sin and God was punishing him with no guarantee of eternal life.

- Discuss

I am thinking about escape hatches and how God's pronouncement may have been more about prompting Hezekiah to come to repentance and receive mercy. Because of Hezekiah's tears and repentance God gave him 15 more years, declaring he would save Judah and defend Jerusalem.

- Why do you think God changed Their mind regarding when Hezekiah would die?
- What was the significance of giving Hezekiah 15 more years?

We focus on God's promise to give Hezekiah 15 more years, but God also says he will defend the city of Jerusalem for the sake of David and for God's own sake. God is not yet ready to hand Jerusalem over and he is not going to hand it over to the Assyrians. As we noted last week, Babylon was (initially) a better choice.

God does not heal Hezekiah directly but directs that figs be applied to the boil as treatment. God doesn't give a miraculous healing but direction on the best treatment so he can heal in the traditional way.

- Discuss

The Retreating Shadow

Hezekiah asks for a sign that he will be healed and will go up to the house of the Lord. In Hebrew law, Hezekiah could not go up to the house of the Lord until he was fully healed. He asks for a sign (remember that Hezekiah's father, in mock piety, refused to ask for a sign even when God made it clear that he should). Isaiah offers him either the

advancing or retreating shadow of the sundial and Hezekiah chooses the retreating sundial as that seemed more difficult to him. God grants Hezekiah the sign and the shadow on the sundial goes back.

- What was the purpose of God giving Hezekiah a sign?

Given that it was unlikely that God turned the world backwards on its axis (due to the likely catastrophic effect to life on earth) other explanations have been offered – such as shadows from other buildings to paleomagnetic spikes to quantum physics style explanations of turning time back (without touching the earth's spin). Or it might just be possible that God stuck his finger over that spot for a bit and when he took it away it appeared that the sun went backwards (I made that explanation up so feel free to ignore that).

- Do we need to know how God made a sign to believe it?

Part 2) Hezekiah's pride

Hezekiah brought in sweeping religious reforms in Judah and trusted God when the Assyrians came and God protected Judah but Hezekiah also became proud because of his great wealth. When a Babylonian envoy came, he foolishly showed them everything.

Hardship and suffering can be tests of our character and faith but having power and prosperity can be a very different and possibly harder test. Hezekiah is not alone in failing the test of power and prosperity.

- o David was a man after God's own heart, except when it came to Bathsheba.
- o Solomon was faithful and blessed but fell away because of his wealth and his women.
- o Uzziah was a faithful king and prosperous but grew arrogant, entering the temple unlawfully and was struck by God.
- What are your thoughts on the "problem" of power and prosperity?
- How did Jesus deal with the test of power prosperity and success (e.g. read [Luke 4:1-13](#); see also [Luke 22: 42](#)).

Isaiah declares that now, the Babylonians will take Judah captive and even some of Hezekiah's own sons would go into captivity (we are not told where Daniel came from but it is implied he was from the royal household). Hezekiah's response to Isaiah's pronouncement, that Babylon will take Judah captive and even Hezekiah's sons will be taken captive to Babylon, seems cold. It seems like all Hezekiah is interested in is that he will have peace in his lifetime.

- Discuss

