

# ISAIAH

## ISAIAH 38:9-22, HEZEKIAH'S ILLNESS & RECOVERY, PART 2

This pericope presents to us a difficult interpretive situation. Verses 10-14 reveal Hezekiah's condition and state of mind about his condition, and verses 15-20 reveal God's response to the king's condition. The question is, are verses 15-20 set after God's promise to heal the king takes place and he is healed, or before his healing when the king is simply contemplating his condition and the promise of being healed? Most commentators believe a shift in focus begins in verse 15 in response to the king's healing after it has occurred. However, the grammar may suggest that Hezekiah is writing the entire song from the standpoint that he is ill, and about to die. Further complicating the issue is the fact that verse 20 suggests that the king has received the promise to be healed, but that it is still in the future. He obviously wrote the whole thing after his illness and his recovery (v. 9), but what happened before he wrote it is the issue.

The fact that Hezekiah's healing is not recorded until verse 21, may not be so out of place after all. Perhaps that is an indication that the king's medical procedure resulting in his healing did not take place until after the thoughts he expressed concerning his condition were completed.

For example, one theologian writes, "The first two lines of v. 15 indicate that the prayer moves to a different time than vv. 10-14, for God has already answered Hezekiah's prayer, is already healing him, and is teaching him new things through this experience" [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 1-39*, 648].

However, it is not so clear that this is the correct interpretation. "*he himself has done it* is clear in its confidence in God, but unclear as to its reference. If 'it' refers to his healing, the king is asking the classic question of the Psalms, 'How shall I respond to God's goodness?' (see, e.g., Ps. 116:12). On the other hand, it is possible that this is an utterance of resignation: 'This affliction is from God and my words are useless' (cf., e.g., Ps 39:9; Luke 22:42). Both positions have scriptural warrant, and the context could be urged in support of either. *I will walk slowly* has two possible interpretations. If the interpretation is positive, then Hezekiah seems to be saying that in his additional fifteen years he will not live in careless ease, taking his life for granted. Rather, this experience will cause him to live humbly and gratefully. He will not forget what he has endured. If a negative position is taken, then the statement must mean for whatever time is left him, the victim will bow his head under the judgment which has befallen him. It is difficult to come to complete certainty concerning the two alternatives for understanding the verse. Neither is totally compelling. However, the final remark of the verse upon 'bitterness of soul' seems to point in the direction of resignation under the divine hand of judgment" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, 686].

John Calvin interpreted this verse to refer to the time before the king was healed. "*What shall I say?*" This is generally supposed to be an exclamation, such as frequently bursts forth

in a season of joy, as if he congratulated himself on having already obtained his wish. But I think differently. Hezekiah appears to proceed in his complaints; for he speaks as men commonly do when they are overcome by grief; "What shall I say? for he who said it hath also done it;" that is, "life and death are in his hand; it is useless for me to argue or contend with him; it is useless for me to complain." In the book of Job also words and sayings of this sort are often found. (Job 7:4.) I think that this is the true meaning; for Hezekiah previously looked around on all sides to see if any assistance appeared, and now, when he sees that he is about to die, and that God has threatened it, he concludes that he ought no longer to resist but to obey" [John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentary on the Book of Isaiah*, 172].

Verse 9 introduces a poem or psalm that Hezekiah wrote after he recovered from his illness. "The Psalm (vv. 9-20) is in the form of the individual lament. Although it ends with the typical anticipation of deliverance, it is not a thanksgiving psalm. Thus it serves, as noted above, to emphasize the writer's mortality more than it does the wonder of his deliverance" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, 674].

Isaiah 38:9 <sup>9</sup>A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah after his illness and recovery:

These words describe Hezekiah's state of mind as he lay dying on his bed. "The writing or composition of Hezekiah is a touching account of the inner thoughts and emotions of a man who looked death in the face and at the last moment received a reprieve" [Victor Buksbazen, *The Prophet Isaiah: A Commentary*, 294].

The grammar in these verses leads me to believe that Hezekiah's writing reflects his state of mind during the time he received the news that his illness was going to kill him. I do not believe it reflects any time after he was healed even though he wrote it after he was healed. We will see that the salvation the last verse of this writing (v. 20) is portraying is still in the future from the setting which was on his deathbed. He anticipates being healed, but he has not yet been healed. I think Buksbazen overstates the case that Hezekiah's writing reflects the fact that "at the last moment [he] received a reprieve." He anticipates being saved, but he hadn't received it yet according to the setting the writing reflects. This psalm was written after he was healed, but it concerned the thoughts running through his mind after the news of his imminent death was revealed, but before he was actually healed, although he apparently anticipated it. This seems to be a lament type of writing that ends with the expectation that Yahweh will save the king's life.

Having said all that, most commentators believe that in verses 15-20, Hezekiah is referring to his healing that has already taken place. It could actually be either one, but I think the preponderance of the grammatical evidence falls on the side of a reference to the anticipation of being healed. Those who believe that the king's healing is in these verses, prefer to classify this psalm as a thanksgiving psalm.

Verse 9 clearly reveals that Hezekiah wrote it after he was healed; he did not write it at the time he was actually ill and on his death bed. The text literally reads, "A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah when his being sick and his recovery from his sickness." A good

literal translation reads, "A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah when he was sick and had recovered from his sickness" (LEB).

Why was this very definitive pronouncement of Hezekiah's death, whether it was imminent or was to occur in 15 years, placed here? Previously, we discussed the concept that chapters 38 and 39 were placed at this point in the book to show the Israelites that Hezekiah was not the Messiah. "... in answer to the question of why such an emphatic statement of Hezekiah's mortality and impotence should be placed here in the book. An answer which seems obvious is that there is a conscious attempt to make it plain that Hezekiah is not the promised Messiah. Despite his ability to trust God and to lead his nation back from the brink of destruction, he is not the Child [Is. 9:6] of whom Isaiah has spoken. He has embodied the trust which is essential if the nation is to serve God, but he is *not* the One in whom that trust is to be reposed. Of that One a fuller revelation (chs. 40-66) still lies ahead" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, 682].

Isaiah 38:10 <sup>10</sup> said, "In the middle of my life I am to enter the gates of Sheol [שְׁאוֹל]; I am to be deprived of the rest of my years."

The reference to the "middle of my life" (literally, "in the middle of my days") is an acknowledgement by the king that his life will prematurely end. At the time of his illness, Hezekiah is in his mid to late thirties which is certainly a time when people do not expect to have their lives ended. The end of his life is in sight; the final clause reads, "I have numbered the remainder of my years." In this case, the number is quite small, but the use of a verb in the perfect tense tells us the time has been set. The imperfect verb "enter" in relation to Sheol tells us he has not yet died.

Some people criticize believers who do not want to die. Their reasoning seems to be that to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8); therefore, we should not fear death. While that may be true, fearing death seems to be built into the soul of human beings. Death is the enemy of life (2 Cor. 15:26), and it is the last enemy that will be abolished; therefore, fearing death and realizing we will be with the Lord immediately upon death are two different issues. This position minimizes the fact that death was never intended to be part of life; death was introduced by sin. People are intrinsically fearful of death, probably because of the unpleasantness surrounding it, the sorrow on the part of loved ones, and the fact of its finality in terms of life as we know it. Since we have yet to experience life in the presence of the Lord, it remains a bit of an abstract concept to us, even though we know it is true, and that it will be far more wonderful than we can imagine. But that is theological truth that is advanced far beyond what Hezekiah knew at the time. He knew that he would not go immediately into the presence of the Lord when he died, but that he would go to Sheol.

Some theologians do not believe that Hezekiah feared death, rather he felt it unfair that he must die prematurely at an age when one would expect to continue living. The king does not want to die, and he is weeping at the thought of it, but the Lord has pronounced his fate and there is nothing he can do to escape it. Entering the gates of Sheol represents finality; once that gate is entered by means of death, there is no turning back, no escape.

Sheol, שְׁאוֹל, was the underworld; the place where the dead reside. It is the equivalent of Hades, ᾗδης, in the New Testament. "Sheol was regarded as an underground region, shadowy and gloomy, where disembodied souls had a conscious but dull and inactive existence. The Hebrew people regarded sheol [sic] as a place to which both the righteous and unrighteous go at death, a place where punishment is received and rewards are enjoyed.... God is present in sheol [sic]. It is open and known to Him. This suggests that in death God's people remain under His care, and the wicked never escape His judgment" [s.v. "Sheol" *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, rev. ed., 1054].

Additional revelation in the New Testament (Luke 16:19-31) informs us that Sheol or Hades had two compartments; one was a place of torment for the unsaved, and one was a place of comfort for God's people, believers. We have to remember that Luke is set in a pre-Pentecost Old Testament period. After the Lord's resurrection, He removed the Old Testament believers from Hades and took them to be with Him in Paradise; therefore, Sheol or Hades is now exclusively used as the holding cell for those who are unbelievers awaiting their final sentence at the Great White Throne Judgment. Their final, permanent home will be the lake of fire.

Isaiah 38:11 <sup>11</sup> I said, "I will not see the LORD, [הָיָה] The LORD [הָיָה] in the land of the living; I will look on man no more among the inhabitants of the world [הָדָרָל]."

In this verse, the king is disturbed about the things he will not have in the future. The relationships Hezekiah has enjoyed in this life will be terminated, in the temporal sense, when his life ends. He does not seem to be saying that he will never have those relationships at all; he is saying that these relationships will end, in a temporal sense, with his death. The blessings he enjoyed in His relationship with Yahweh and with other people were going to end as he knew them. What lay before him in death, was unclear, and he was lamenting the fact that what he knew was going to be removed. As a believer, he will certainly continue to have a relationship with God. And we know that he would see his believing friends and family again in the saved section of Sheol when they are reunited with him in their deaths and entrance into the saved section of Sheol.

The LORD is not the familiar יהוה, Yahweh, but it is יה, Yah, which is what Motyer calls an "affectionate diminutive," and *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament* calls an "endearing term." The text actually reads, "I said, I will not see Yah Yah ..."

There is a textual issue in this verse concerning the word "world." The word that is in the Masoretic text is לְהַדָּרָל, meaning cessation, but the word is translated "world." It may also be thought of as a reference to the underworld, Sheol. This word occurs only in this verse.

"Despite the fact it is translated 'world,' it conveys the idea of a place of termination or repose. By considering the context in the Old Testament, one comes to understand that the word refers to the grave, or more exactly, Sheol" [Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter, s.v. "הָדָרָל," *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*, 316].

"The Hebrew text has לְהַדָּרָל (*khadel*), which appears to be derived from a verbal root meaning "to cease, refrain." But the form has probably suffered an error of transmission;

the original form (attested in a few medieval Hebrew MSS) was likely *הָעוֹלָם* (*kheled*, 'world') [*The NET Bible*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. "Isaiah 38:11," 1282, n. m]. This seems to be incorrect.

If cessation is the original meaning, then the sense that Hezekiah is conveying is that he will be with those who live in cessation, that is, those who are alive but whose life in this temporal realm has ceased and who are now in Sheol. If "world" is the meaning, then it simply refers to the fact that Hezekiah will no longer be dwelling with God and with man on earth.

Keil and Delitzsch believe it refers to cessation. "The clause, 'Jah in the land of the living,' i.e., the God of salvation who reveals Himself in the land of the living, is followed by the corresponding clause ... 'I dwelling with the inhabitants of the region of the dead;' for whilst *הָעוֹלָם* signifies temporal life ... *הַשְּׁאוֹל* signifies the end of this life, the negation of all conscious activity of being, the region of the dead" [C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Isaiah*, vol. 7, 7:376].

"*הַשְּׁאוֹל* Hades, prop. the place of rest. If this be the import of this word, the whole verse must be construed thus: 'I said, I shall not see Jah even Jah in the land of the living; I shall behold man no more; with (i.e., when I am with) the inhabitants of Hades'" [H. W. F. Gesenius, s.v. "*הַשְּׁאוֹל*," *Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, 262].

"The word *הַשְּׁאוֹל* [sic] means 'cease, cessation,' which does not fit well in this context. 1QIsa agrees with the MT. The Targum refers to the 'earth, land,' suggesting the idea that metathesis [the transposition of sounds or letters in a word] has occurred. The word was probably originally *הָעוֹלָם* [sic] 'world' with the ל and the ט getting reversed early in transmission. Delitzsch, 'Isaiah,' ... keeps the MT and views *הַשְּׁאוֹל* [sic] as a reference to the place where life has ceased, the dwelling of the dead, but this approach creates a poor parallel with the preceding line" [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 1-39*, 646, n. 201].

In addition to the Old Testament lexicons and commentaries cited above, two English versions that I am aware of understand the meaning to be cessation or Sheol.

Isaiah 38:11 <sup>11</sup>... I will not look on humanity any longer with the inhabitants of what is passing away [HCSB]

Isaiah 38:11 <sup>11</sup>... and I'll no longer observe human beings among the denizens of the grave [ISV]

When verses 10 and 11 are considered together, the context suggests that verse 10 is referring to Hezekiah's death and entrance into Sheol, and verse 11 is a lament over the fact that he will no longer see Yahweh and his fellow man on earth among the living because he will be in Sheol.

However, I went through all this because it troubles me that the word in Hebrew as written in the Masoretic Text, which is the basis for the Old Testament, means one thing and almost every translation translates it as though it means something else. The assumption is that the Hebrew text is incorrect, per some manuscripts and the Targum, so they correct

it in the translation while leaving the Hebrew word as it is in the Masoretic Text. They don't dare change the Masoretic Text, so they change the translation instead. That does not seem to me to be the way to interpret the text.

In verses 12-14, Hezekiah expresses his feelings about his imminent death when he will enter through the gates of Sheol. He uses some metaphors to describe his death.

Isaiah 38:12-14 <sup>12</sup>“Like a shepherd's tent my dwelling is pulled up [נָסַע] and removed [נִגְלָה] from [גְּלָה] from me; As a weaver I rolled up my life. He cuts [קָצַע] from [יִבְצֵעַ] me off from the loom; From day until night You make an end [תְּשַׁלֵּימַן] of [שָׁלַם] me. <sup>13</sup>“I composed my soul until morning. Like a lion—so He breaks [שָׁבַר] from [יִשְׁבֵּר] all my bones, From day until night You make an end of me. <sup>14</sup>“Like a swallow, like a crane, so I twitter; I moan like a dove; My eyes look wistfully [דָּלֵל] to the heights; O Lord, I am oppressed [צָשָׁקָה], be my security [צָרַב].

Pulled up, נָסַע, is a perfect verb which means a completed action indicating that Hezekiah, probably based on the fact that Yahweh, through Isaiah, told Hezekiah that he was going to die, is speaking not of his imminent death, but as though his death has already occurred. Removed, נִגְלָה, is in a verb form that is passive which indicates that Yahweh is the one taking Hezekiah's life. The king is not voluntarily giving up his life; his life is being taken from him. In the metaphor of the loom, cuts, קָצַע, is an imperfect verb form meaning the action is not yet complete, Hezekiah has not died yet, but the action of the verb is very intense. The cutting off results in a devastating, permanent condition, which, in this case, is death.

Death is as abrupt as a shepherd's tent that is anchored in place as a home for some period of time, only to be taken down when it is time to move the flock. Weavers work on a piece of cloth for some period of time, but when it has reached the appropriate size, it is cut off the loom and taken away.

These metaphors portray life. Life can seem so permanent to us as we live day-to-day, but it ends suddenly and we move on to our eternal destiny. So it was with Hezekiah.

The final clause was probably a proverbial saying referring to the suddenness of death. People get up in the morning, they live their lives that day, and by night, they are dead and gone. Again, it is Yahweh who makes an end of him. End, שָׁלַם, means to be completed or finished, and in this verb form, it is brought about or caused by Yahweh. This saying is repeated as the last clause of verse 13. The word conveys a sense of mourning.

Hezekiah tried to settle down for the night, but he found no respite from his illness. It is as though the king is under attack from a fierce lion who is destroying his body and causing him to suffer intense emotional distress. Breaks, שָׁבַר, is in a verb form that indicates an intensive kind of action, which, in this case, is caused by Yahweh. Hezekiah is not dying a pleasant death. “He compares his death to the breaking of all his bones. It is an utter crushing and destroying such as a lion would wreak upon its prey. The death that God sends him is like the attack of a lion who breaks all the bones of its prey. In mentioning the bones the king refers to a destruction that is thorough and complete” [Edward J.

Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 2, 2:521]. His pain, his suffering, and his weakness caused him to think of his cries to God as ineffective as the birds chirping and the doves moaning, and we all know how mournful the call of a dove sounds.

Hezekiah continued to look to Yahweh for deliverance; he has not given up all hope even though he is desperate and in an emotional state of despair. He is so weak that he can hardly cry out to God for deliverance as he nevertheless looks to God to be delivered. Wistfully, *דָּלַל*, means to languish and to become feeble. It carries the sense of the languishing of hope before one's eyes. Looking to the heights is a metaphorical way of saying that the king was looking to Yahweh to save him. The king admitted his weakness; he could not save himself. He was oppressed, *עֲשָׂקָה*, which refers to being in an oppressed state which is a state of being kept down by the unjust use of force or authority. It can mean defrauding, robbing people of what belongs to them or to denying justice to the poor, the laborer, the slave, the widow, and the orphan. Security, *עָרַב*, means to stand surety for, to be responsible for someone, to lend support for someone's cause, or to take or give as a pledge. It is ironic that Hezekiah must look to the same God for deliverance who was the one who pronounced that he was going to die and who has been oppressing him in the process! To be his pledge or security is a "legal metaphor [that] pictures God in the role of one who would stand up for a friend or family member in a court setting and guarantees or gives a pledge to support the accused" [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 1-39*], 648].

Beginning in verse 15, many theologians, probably most, believe Hezekiah has received his healing. I am not convinced of that assertion, but I do not think it wise to totally dismiss it either. Most theologians consider these verses to be very difficult to accurately interpret. My interpretation of these verses presents the viewpoint that Hezekiah has been promised his healing, but he has yet to receive it.

Isaiah 38:15 <sup>15</sup>"What shall I say? For He has spoken to me, and He Himself has done it; I will wander [*דָּדָה*] about all my years because of the bitterness [*מַר*] of my soul.

Hezekiah is grateful that Yahweh heard his plea and positively responded to his prayers—"for He has spoken"—by promising the king 15 more years of life, and Hezekiah knows Yahweh's promise is as good as done, although its fulfillment will be in the future, a prophetic perfect. The perfect verb tense refers to completed action past, present, or future.

Hezekiah was determined to wander through the rest of his years, *דָּדָה*, referring to going slowly by living a quiet, peaceful life characterized by humility before Yahweh.

Even though Hezekiah has received the promise of 15 more years of life, he will never forget the bitterness this ordeal engendered in his soul for all of his remaining years. Bitterness, *מַר*, means bitterness or to be bitter referring to a rough and bitter manner or feeling. This sort of intense physical and emotional ordeal can take a toll on one's health, physical and mental, for a lifetime. Today, we refer to this sort of thing as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD. Most theologians understand the promise of a life extended and

the healing as simultaneous events, and that is possible, but I do not think the text demands that interpretation.

Isaiah 38:16 <sup>16</sup>“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!

It is not clear what “these” is referring to. Motyer believes the reference to these things is to the “suffering faced in prayer, by the Lord’s answer to prayer, and by responsive commitment” [J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 237]. The king’s spirit found life in these things.

Restore me to health should be translated, “may you restore me to health,” or “you will restore me to health” (NKJV). The grammatical sense is that you will strengthen me and let me get well, which is future. The grammar here “expresses a consequence that is expected with certainty.... Thus these words communicate that ‘you will cause me to be strong/healthy (not past tense as in NIV) and (the result will be that) you will cause me to live.’ This is Hezekiah’s way of attributing all the glory for his recovery to God’s activity and of expressing his confident trust in God to complete the process so that he may live longer” [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 1-39*, 649]. This suggests that at this point in time, the healing has yet to take place. The promise to heal is in place; the healing is not yet in place. The healing will also result in not just physical life, but a life well lived by a grateful king.

Isaiah 38:17 <sup>17</sup>“Lo, for *my own welfare* [שְׁלוֹם] I had great bitterness; It is You who has kept my soul from the pit of nothingness, For You have cast all my sins behind Your back.

“Welfare” here is the Hebrew word *shalom*, שְׁלוֹם, meaning completeness, well-being, health, and salvation; it represents a complete, well lived life in peace and contentment. “Peace” is the more common, and better, translation (cf. KJV, NKJV, ASV, LEG, YLT). “[H]e realizes that the bitter experience of facing death had the greater goal of bringing a deeper sense of appreciation for his ‘well-being, peace’ (*šā·lôm*) after God intervened. This expresses a certain level of acceptance of what has happened and an admission that he has grown through the process. He now has a greater faith in God, an assurance that he will live longer, and a much deeper appreciation for his family and the little things that he would have missed, had he died” [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 1-39*, 649].

Hezekiah appropriately gave Yahweh the credit for saving his soul from death, and for forgiving his sins. This is probably a reference to Hezekiah’s pride which seems to have been the root of the problem (cf. 2 Chron. 32:25, “his heart was proud”). Turning away from pride may have been a key lesson in this situation for the king to learn. Sin is the cause of death; therefore, Hezekiah knew that once Yahweh forgave his sins, he was going to live.



Isaiah 38:18–19 <sup>18</sup>“For Sheol cannot thank [תודה] You, Death cannot praise [הלל] You; Those who go down to the pit cannot hope [שׁוּבֵר] for Your faithfulness. <sup>19</sup>“It is the living who give thanks to You, as I do today; A father tells his sons about Your faithfulness.

These two verses are very difficult to interpret. Verse 18 is a negative statement concerning the dead who cannot praise God, and verse 19 is a positive statement concerning those who are living and can therefore praise God. Constable simply says, “Those who die cannot thank and praise God for delivering them from death, but Hezekiah could because God had promised him mercy” [Thomas L. Constable, *Thomas Constable's Notes on the Bible, Volume IV, Isaiah-Daniel*, 4:105].

Giving thanks to God, praising God, and hoping in God are all aspects of praise which the dead cannot do, but the living can do. The living are to talk about God's faithfulness and the faithful things He has done. They are to especially pass the knowledge of those things on to other people, particularly their children. Hezekiah was doing just that in this lament psalm giving praise and thanksgiving here. Many theologians criticize Hezekiah because his son, Manasseh, apparently did not learn of God's faithfulness at his father's knee; however, as we noted in an earlier lesson, Manasseh did turn to the Lord later in life. Perhaps his father's instruction was not in vain after all.

Thank, תודה, means to express praise and gratitude, give thanks, or to confess. In this context, it refers to the expression of gratitude or the show of appreciation to.

Praise, הלל, means to praise, to admire, to exclaim Hallelujah, to be praised, or praiseworthy. The sense is to extol the greatness of a deity or the deity's works as an act of worship.

Hope, שׁוּבֵר, means to wait or to hope for referring to expecting and wishing for something.

Isaiah 38:20 <sup>20</sup>“The LORD will surely save [יִשְׁע] me; So we will play my songs on stringed instruments All *the* days of our life at the house of the LORD.”

This verse also exhibits the grammatical characteristics of a future event. “Will save” indicates the future (NASB, HCSB, ESV, ISV), “is ready to save” (ASV) is also future, and “is about to deliver” (NET Bible) also has a future sense to it. “... [T]he infinitive is being used to express the imminent future. Thus the writer expresses his conviction that God has heard his cry and will deliver. This feature is typical of the lament form” [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, 689].

Save, יִשְׁע, in this context, means to deliver, to rescue, to help, to save referring to saving from ruin, destruction, or harm. The concept of bringing to a place of safety is the primary meaning, although it may also be used in the sense of justification salvation. “All the days of our life” refers to the depth of gratitude the king felt for his deliverance.

As thanks for his deliverance from death, Hezekiah commits to praising and worshiping Yahweh with music in Yahweh's house. This public display of worship would be part of the thanks to Yahweh for saving him that he expressed in verse 19.

The grammar in verses 15-20 convinces me that Hezekiah's entire psalm is written from the standpoint that he has been promised deliverance from death, but it has yet to take place. The psalm was written after he was delivered, but the context relates to the time immediately preceding it.

Isaiah 38:21 <sup>21</sup>Now Isaiah had said, "Let them take a cake of figs and apply it to the boil [פֶּשֶׁחַיִן], that he may recover."

Boil, פֶּשֶׁחַיִן, means a boil, an eruption, skin sores, or an inflamed ulcer referring to a painful sore with a hard core filled with pus. The important element here is the infection accompanying the sore which could threaten life as it spreads throughout the body.

It is quite possible that this refers to anthrax. Anthrax is a disease "that can be transmitted to humans by cattle, sheep, goats, and horses. The disease is caused by a rod-shaped bacterium that forms spores. These spores, in turn, can infect humans, who develop a boil-like lesion with a pustule (blain). In the infectious stage, the blain is called a malignant pustule" [s.v. "Diseases of the Bible" *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, rev. ed., 320].

Unger described it as "Malignant pustules. These are due to infections from animals having splenic fever. The virus is carried by insects or in wool or hides or otherwise, and produces a black spot where it enters, surrounded by a dark livid purplish or dusky red zone, with vesicles and a hard area of skin infiltrated with anthrax bacilli. If the focus of the disease is not destroyed the blood is rapidly poisoned, and the patient dies" [Merrill F. Unger, s.v. "Diseases," *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 306-307].

Figs were thought to be used as a poultice to draw infection out of a wound, but whether that was the case here or whether rubbing figs on the area was simply a symbol of Yahweh's healing power, we don't know. Either way, God is the healer; He is the source of medicine and medical treatments, and He is the source of the miraculous.

There has been some research to suggest that figs were used for medicinal purposes. The Ugaritic *Ras Shamra* mentioned figs in relation to healing [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 2, 2:529, n. 34]. ], and one commentator "reports the use of figs in the Ugaritic text to heal diseases in horses, in a Mesopotamian text to treat mouth diseases, in an Egyptian text for medicinal purposes, and a similar Arab tradition" [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 1-39*, 652, n. 224].

Most theologians view this as a miraculous healing from God. "But it was not the figs themselves that would heal the king. God is often pleased to use means in the performance of his works, and that He does in this case. What brought healing to Hezekiah was the Word of God, the Word that is powerful and efficacious. Apart from the promised Word, the figs would not have healed the king. He was in such a state or condition that no mere medicine could have preserved his life. For Hezekiah supernatural intervention was needed and this was given. The figs were but a means to show that God's power was at work" [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 2, 2:529].

We do have a New Testament example of this type of healing situation when Christ Jesus placed some clay wet with spit on a blind man's eyes which, coupled with washing in the Pool of Siloam, cured his blindness. No one thinks the clay and the spit and the pool had any medicinal efficacy; the Lord miraculously healed his blindness (John 9:1-7). Another Old Testament example of this type of healing situation was the example of the leprous Assyrian army captain, Naaman, who was sent by Elisha to wash in the Jordan seven times which cured his leprosy (2 Kings 5:1-14). Again, no one thinks that this was anything other than a miraculous healing.

Isaiah 38:22 <sup>22</sup>Then Hezekiah had said, "What is the sign [אֵיִתָּא] that I shall go up to the house of the LORD?"

Sign, אֵיִתָּא, means a sign, a banner, a military ensign, but in this context, it is referring to a marvelous event manifesting the supernatural act of a divine agent, often with an emphasis on communicating a message.

The sign will serve as an authenticating message that Yahweh's Word is certain to come to pass as prophesied.

Hezekiah was not only anticipating his healing, but he was anticipating being able to go to the Temple again. He needed to be healed to do that; this disease would have made him unclean and therefore unfit to enter the Temple area.