

SECOND KINGS

Chapter 20

Hezekiah's Illness and Recovery

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.’” 2 **Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, saying,** 3 **“Now, O LORD, please 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.** 4 **And before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him:** 5 **“Turn back, and say to Hezekiah the leader of my people, Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: 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. I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city for my own sake and for my servant David's sake.”** 7 **And Isaiah said, “Bring a cake of figs. And let them take and lay it on the boil, that he may recover.”** 8 **And Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “What shall be the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of the LORD on the third day?”** 9 **And Isaiah said, “This shall be the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that he has promised: shall the shadow go forward ten steps, or go back ten steps?”** 10 **And Hezekiah answered, “It is an easy thing for the shadow to lengthen ten steps. Rather let the shadow go back ten steps.”** 11 **And Isaiah the prophet called to the LORD, and he brought the shadow back ten steps, by which it had gone down on the steps of Ahaz.**

20:1–11 The Lord answered Hezekiah’s prayer in another matter. He received divine help not only in national calamity (chs 18–19) but also in personal affliction. His recovery from a fatal illness likely occurred during the Assyrian invasion (20:6, 19). (TLSB)

20:1 *In those days.* Hezekiah’s illness (vv. 1–11) as well as his reception of envoys from Babylon (vv. 12–19) must have preceded the Assyrian campaign in 701 B.C. Babylonian records indicate that Merodach-Baladan (v. 12) died in Elam after being expelled from Babylon in 703. *Put your house in order.* Arrangements of a testamentary nature needed to be made, especially with respect to throne succession. (CSB)

house in order. Prepare the successor to your throne. (TLSB)

you shall die. Assuming that Hezekiah was 25 years old in 715 when he began his sole reign (see 18:2) and that his illness occurred a little more than 15 years prior to his death (see note on v. 6), he would have been about 37 or 38 years old at this time. (CSB)

20:3 *walked before you in faithfulness ... and have done what is good.* Hezekiah’s prayer is not an appeal for divine favor that is based on good works, but it expresses the realization that the Lord graciously favors those who earnestly serve him (see note on 2Sa 22:21). (CSB)

Wrestling with the Lord in prayer, as Jacob did (Gn 32:22–32), Hezekiah holds the Lord to the oft-repeated covenant promise that those will “live long” who “walk in all the way that the LORD ... has commanded” (Dt 5:33; see also the promise attached to obedience to parents, Dt 5:16). In his song of praise after his recovery, the king confesses his need of forgiveness for “all my sins” (Is 38:17), thus

disavowing any self-righteous claim to God's goodness. Cyr Jer: "Take heed lest without reason you mistrust the power of repentance... Hezekiah did not desist from repentance; but remembering what is written, *When you shall turn and lament, then shall you be saved* [Is 30:15], he turned to the wall" (NPNF 2 7:11). (TLSB)

whole heart. Lit, "heart of peace"; content. (TLSB)

20:4 *middle court.* Apparently a location within the palace. (TLSB)

20:5 *father.* Aph: "Hezekiah prayed, and was healed of his sickness; Jesus prayed, and arose from the abode of the dead. Hezekiah after he arose from his sickness added to his years; and Jesus after His Resurrection received great glory. Hezekiah, after the prolongation of his life, death was given dominion over him; but Jesus, after that He rose, death shall not again have dominion over Him for ever" (NPNF 2 13:398). (TLSB)

I will heal you. God is the one who sovereignly ordains all that comes to pass (Ps 139:16; Eph 1:11). Hezekiah's petition and God's response demonstrate that (1) divine sovereignty does not make prayer inappropriate but, on the contrary, it establishes it, and (2) both prayer and the divine response to prayer are to be included in one's conception of God's sovereign plan (see 1Ki 21:29; Eze 33:13–16). (CSB)

20:6 *add fifteen years to your life.* Hezekiah died in 686 B.C. The beginning of the extension of his life is thus to be placed no later than 702. (CSB)

20:7 *cake of figs.* The Lord healed Hezekiah (see v. 5), but divine healing does not necessarily exclude the use of known remedies. (CSB)

Still used for medical purposes in the Near East. (TLSB)

boil. Serious infection during an era lacking antibiotics. (TLSB)

20:8 *sign.* Evidently, Hezekiah requested the sign before the cure (v 7) took place. Isaiah had rebuked Hezekiah's father, Ahaz, for refusing to ask for a sign (Is 7:10–14). (TLSB)

20:11 *back ten steps.* Normal recording of the sun's progress on "the steps of Ahaz" was reversed. Apparently, the phenomenon was observed only locally (2Ch 32:31). An outer stairway may have been built in such a way as to let the sun's shadow appear on various levels as the day wore on, or something like a sundial could be meant. (TLSB)

20:1–11 The Lord heeds Hezekiah's prayer and heals him. At times, people wonder whether prayer really matters to God, as He already knows all things and what will happen. This passage removes any excuse for holding your tongue in the hour of need. Call on the Lord, as He invites you to do, and trust, like faithful Hezekiah, that the Lord indeed hears and answers for His mercy's sake, which He has revealed to us in Christ. • O Lord, remember me, and hear my daily requests for the sake of Your promises through Jesus. Amen. (TLSB)

Hezekiah and the Babylonian Envoys

12 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 Hezekiah had been sick. 13 And Hezekiah welcomed them, and he showed them all his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his 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. 14 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?” And Hezekiah said, “They have come from a far country, from Babylon.” 15 He said, “What have they seen in your house?” And Hezekiah answered, “They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing in my storehouses that I did not show them.” 16 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the LORD: 17 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. 18 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.” 19 Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good.” For he thought, “Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days?” 20 The rest of the deeds of Hezekiah and all his might and how he made the pool and the conduit and brought water into the city, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? 21 And Hezekiah slept with his fathers, and Manasseh his son reigned in his place.

20:12 *At that time.* Perhaps c 712 BC. As in the case of Hezekiah’s illness and cure (vv 1–7), his reception of the Babylonian embassy is not supplied with a definite date. Though this incident occurred after Hezekiah’s sickness, its relationship to the Assyrian invasion (chs 17–18) is not clear. Hezekiah had not as yet emptied his treasure house of its silver and gold (18:15). (TLSB)

Merodach-Baladan. Means “(The god) Marduk has given me a son.” He ruled in Babylon 721–710 B.C. before being forced to submit to Assyrian domination by Sargon II of Assyria. Sometime after Sargon’s death in 705, Merodach-Baladan briefly reestablished Babylonian independence and ruled in Babylon until Sennacherib forced him to flee in 703. (CSB)

This Babylonian ruler gathered a coalition of several nations against Assyria in 703 BC. (TLSB)

sent envoys with letters and a present. See 2Ch 32:31; Isa 39. It is likely that Merodach-Baladan was attempting to draw Hezekiah into an alliance against Assyria. Although Hezekiah rejected the pro-Assyrian policies of his father Ahaz (see 16:7) and rebelled against Assyria (see 18:7), he erred in seeking to strengthen Israel’s security by friendship with Babylon and Egypt (see 2Ch 32:31; Isa 30–31). (CSB)

Hezekiah’s recovery from illness was only a diplomatic window dressing for the real purpose of the mission. The Babylonian envoys came to enlist support in the west for a resistance movement against Assyrian domination. Hipp: “Merodach the Chaldean, king of Babylon, being struck with amazement at the time [which changed (v 11)]—for he studied the science of astrology, and measured the courses of these bodies carefully—on learning the cause, sent a letter and gifts to Hezekiah, just as also the wise men from the east did to Christ” (ANF 5:176). (TLSB)

20:13 *welcomed them and he showed them all his treasures.* Hezekiah’s reception of the delegation from Babylon was overly hospitable. Perhaps it was an attempt to bolster Judah’s security by impressing the Babylonians with the wealth and power of his kingdom as a basis for mutual cooperation against the Assyrians. In principle this was a denial of the covenantal nature of the royal office in Israel. (CSB)

Hezekiah displayed the resources that he could contribute to a joint attempt to throw off the Assyrian yoke (vv 12–15). (TLSB)

silver ... oil. The presence of these treasures in Jerusalem is evidence that this incident occurred before the payment of tribute to Sennacherib in 701 B.C. (see 18:15–16). (CSB)

20:14 *Isaiah ... came.* Prophets could serve as court counsel. (TLSB)

What did those men say ... ? Hezekiah gave no response to Isaiah's question concerning the diplomatic purpose of the Babylonian envoys. (CSB)

Prophet boldly questions the king, a testimony to their close relationship and to Isaiah's determination to lead the king in seeing his error. (TLSB)

20:17–19 Isaiah reproved the king for pride in his own strength and trust in a foreign alliance. Sennacherib's invasion was soon to teach the vain king the futility of his boasting. Ironically, the very nation enlisting his cooperation would, in 587 BC, carry off the treasures and inhabitants of Jerusalem to its land of Babylon. (TLSB)

20:17 *carried to Babylon.* Hezekiah's reception of the Babylonians would bring the exact opposite of what he desired and expected. Isaiah's prediction of Babylonian exile at least 115 years before it happened is all the more remarkable because, when he spoke, it appeared that Assyria rather than Babylon was the world power from whom Judah had the most to fear. (CSB)

20:18 *some of your sons ... shall be taken away.* Hezekiah's own son Manasseh was taken by the Assyrians and held prisoner for a while in Babylon (see 2Ch 33:11); later, many more from the house of David were to follow (see 24:15; 25:7; Da 1:3). (CSB)

eunuchs. Hbr word translated "officer" in Gn 37:36; 1Ki 22:9; 2Ki 8:6. In some instances, these men were castrated. Cf Est 2:3; see notes, 2Ki 9:32; Is 56:3. Castration would directly threaten the Davidic dynasty, though the Lord would prevent the total loss of the family. Aph: "The Kingdom of the Son of Man shall be established, an eternal Kingdom.... Be quiet, O you [ruler] that does exalt yourself; vaunt not yourself! For if your wealth has lifted up your heart, it is not more abundant than that of Hezekiah, who went in and boasted of it before the Babylonians, (yet) it was all of it carried away and went to Babylon. And if you glory in your children, they shall be led away from you to the Beast, as the children of King Hezekiah were led away, and became eunuchs in the palace of the King of Babylon" (NPNF 2 13:354). (TLSB)

20:19 *word ... is good.* Although it is possible to understand Hezekiah's statement as a selfish expression of relief that he himself would not experience the announced adversity, it seems better to take it as a humble acceptance of the Lord's judgment (see 2Ch 32:26) and as gratefulness for the intervening time of peace that the Lord in his mercy was granting to his people. (CSB)

Why not ... in my days? His self-centered response, showing little regard for his descendants, seems shocking. Perhaps he hoped that if God postponed the disaster, He could be moved to avert it entirely if the next generation would truly repent. (TLSB)

20:20 *the pool and the conduit.* Hezekiah built a tunnel from the Gihon spring (see 1Ki 1:33, 38) to a reservoir (2Ch 32:30) within the city's walls (see map No. 8 at the end of the Study Bible). This greatly reduced Jerusalem's vulnerability to siege by guaranteeing a continuing water supply. In 1880 an inscription (the Siloam inscription; see chart on "Ancient Texts Relating to the OT") was found in the rock wall at the entrance to this tunnel, describing the method of its construction. The tunnel, cut through solid rock, is over 1,700 feet long; its height varies from 3 2/3 feet to 11 1/2 feet and it averages 2 feet in width. (CSB)

Summary of Hezekiah's reign specially mentions the tunnel he made through solid rock from Gihon Spring outside Jerusalem to the Pool of Siloam within the city's walls. More than 1,700 ft long, this

amazing engineering feat was discovered in 1838. On its wall is a Hbr inscription of Hezekiah's day, telling of the tunnel's construction. (TLSB)

20:12–21 Hezekiah displays unusual callousness in a spiritual matter, gladly accepting a prophecy condemning his descendants. When you consider the future, curb the pride you take in this hour and take pride in faithful sons and daughters who trust in the Lord and honor His calling and grace. The Lord will not fail to show mercy toward all who trust in His goodness. • Lord, speak Your good Word to me, my children, and my grandchildren, that we may know Your everlasting peace. Amen. (TLSB)