

WEEK 08

ISAIAH 38

The LORD's grace and mercy is sufficient even for the boldest request made from a faithful and honest heart.

Preface

In the previous weeks, we learned about God's judgment upon His enemies and His promise to redeem those who stand firm in faith, especially when facing opposition. Last week, we learned that God protects the humble and prayerful and keeps His promises to deliver them.

This week, we will learn about God's grace in His answer to Hezekiah's prayer, upon his sincere and honest plea.

Context and History: Many scholars suggest that the events in Isaiah 38-39 took place before the events in Isaiah 36-37, because according to Isa 38:6, Jerusalem had not been delivered from the Assyrian attack yet. Isa. 38 recorded how King Hezekiah was dying, yet the LORD extended his life in response to his prayer. This was likely to take place in around 703-701 BC, right before Assyria besieged Jerusalem. A parallel record can be found in 2 Kings 20:1-11.

Observation

1. What was Hezekiah's posture and attitude when he pleaded with the LORD? (Isa. 38:2-3)?
2. Why did the LORD show a sign to Hezekiah, and what was the sign? (Isa. 38:7-8)

Leaders' note: Isa. 38:7-8 is actually the answer to Isa. 38:22 (see 2 Kings 20:8-11). The order was swapped probably because the author wanted to present Hezekiah's song (Isa. 38:9-20) as the climax of the text.

3. Summarize how Hezekiah went from hopelessness to hopefulness in his song (Isa. 38:9-20). What was the turning point?

Interpretation

1. How did the LORD identify Himself in His response to Hezekiah in Isa. 38:5? How does it provide a reason for why the LORD added 15 years to Hezekiah's life (Isa 38:5-6)?

Leaders' note: The LORD referred to Himself as "God of your father David". It shows that God is faithful to His promises. Historically, Hezekiah's son (Manasseh) was born during this 15-year period, who became his successor. He then preserved David's lineage, from whom Joseph – the earthly father of Jesus – was born.

2. What was the symbolic meaning of the sign given by the LORD? (Isa 38:7-8)

Leaders' note: The sun casts shadows on more or fewer steps depending on the time of day. This sign is a symbolic representation of Hezekiah's life that was passing away and about to be restored. The practical impossibility of "reversing" daylight also proved that it was a miraculous sign.

3. In other English translations, the word “benefit” in Isa. 38:17 is translated as “peace”. How does this verse show the impact of sins and the power of God’s restoration?

Leaders’ note: In the Old Testament, sickness was often seen as a punishment from God. Hezekiah initially viewed his suffering as a punishment for his sins, which were then forgiven by God. In the New Testament, Jesus disproved this belief in John 9. Nonetheless, this verse still teaches us that sin can impact both our spiritual and physical well-being. Through genuine repentance, we can seek restoration from God. While physical restoration on earth is not guaranteed, God promises to give us a new body in the eternal life.

4. Why is it important for Hezekiah to write his “song”? (Isa. 38:9-20)

Leaders’ note: He wrote his praise to express his worshipful response to God’s restoration. Declaring God’s work through worship is important to tell others and the future generations about God’s faithfulness (v.19).

Application

1. God already knows what we need before we ask Him (Matthew 6:8). All the days ordained for us were written in His book (Psalm 139:16). If you were in Hezekiah's situation in Isa. 38:1, would you still pray to God? Why or why not?

2. Share the boldest / the most emotional / the most honest prayer you have ever made to God. What was that prayer experience like?

3. How can we expand or enrich our worship experience as a community, especially when we receive answers to our prayers?

Optional Follow-Up Exercise: Writing your own psalm

Psalms are great examples of genuine expression of the authors’ raw emotion to God. Isaiah 38:9-20 is a psalm of lamentation and praise expressed by Hezekiah, filled with his anguish and transformation to hope. This week, try writing your own psalm using a similar format. Allow yourself to dwell in His presence through reflecting, wrestling, writing, and praising God.

Format of Hezekiah’s psalm:

(i) Present your anxieties, worries, and difficulties;

(ii) Come to a turning point, e.g. recognizing God’s sovereignty or repenting your sins;

(iii) End with thanksgiving and praises to God.