
Isaiah 38

When Hezekiah heard that he was sick unto death he turned unto the Lord in mighty prayer. His life was extended fifteen years. Isaiah instructs Hezekiah to apply a fig poultice. Hezekiah composes a hymn of praise and gratitude to the Lord.

vv. 1–8. Hezekiah was sick unto death and advised by the Lord through Isaiah to get his house in order. Hezekiah turns to God in might prayer. Isaiah tells Hezekiah that the Lord has heard his prayer and has extended his life and furthermore, that Jerusalem would be delivered from Assyria. Isaiah asks Hezekiah to choose from one of two possible signs that this would come to pass.

1 ¶ IN those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came unto him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order: ✓ for thou shalt die, and not live.

✓ Give charge concerning thy house

IN those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. Exegetes are not agreed as to whether these words of Isaiah were given before or after the Assyrian menace. In the Talmud tradition, Hezekiah, having foresight as to the wickedness of his progeny, preferred not to have children. Tradition has it that he asked the Prophet Isaiah for his daughter in marriage but that the latter told him it was too late to avert punishment (Seder Zerai'm, Berachoth 10a). A footnote in Berachoth 10b suggests that eventually Isaiah conceded and out of this marriage wicked King Manasseh was born. If this were the case, and we follow Jewish tradition, then Isaiah was murdered by his own grandson. ¶ To us as LDS, this is a very interesting point: the idea of *sickness unto death*. It reminds us of someone *appointed unto death* (D&C 42:48, see also header to 2 Kings 20, in our LDS edition, about this very matter of King Hezekiah's appointment unto death). Elder Orson Pratt wrote: "When a man or a woman is appointed unto death you, nor I, nor Peter, nor James, nor Paul, nor John, nor any other man of God can heal them in the name of Jesus. Why? Because God has otherwise determined. But that did not do away the gift of healing in ancient times; that gift was abundantly made manifest, notwithstanding there were many who were sick who were not healed."¹ Elder George Q. Cannon wrote: "There is room for an

increase of exertion and an exhibition of greater faith, as a people, than we have ever yet exhibited. The Lord is ready, according to our own testimonies, to pour out upon us every blessing that we need. Are we sick? Are any of our households sick? What is the privilege of the Latter-day Saints according to our doctrines, according to the teachings of these books (the Bible and the Book of Mormon), and according to our own belief? It is our privilege to exercise faith in the name of Jesus Christ, to have the sick, *where not appointed unto death*, restored to life. This is the privilege of the Latter-day Saints, the privilege of every faithful man and woman in the Church of Christ upon all the face of the earth."² Elder Franklin D. Richards taught: "We ought first to go to the Lord and exercise our faith as far as we can make use of it in that direction, and we will make fewer blunders than we do in placing implicit confidence in the medical and surgical professions. When we do this we are certainly sure of one thing—we secure the help of God and the help of angels; and if *we are appointed unto death*, we want to go. We ought to want to go. Our prayers and supplications should be always conditional—that is, if not *appointed unto death* that he or she should be raised up. And if the heavens want a man to labor there in any sphere, there is where he should be ... Now, when the Presidency want a man to go on a mission, he ought to go. It is best for that man that he should go. It is best for all concerned that he should go to the place he is sent and labor with all his heart. Just so with us. Here we are on a mission in the world. The matter of death is a very small matter. It is a matter of life or death to be sure; but if the Lord does not want us here, and we are taken away, His will be done on earth as it is done in heaven."³ ¶ As Priesthood holders we ought to always seek out the will of the Lord rather than our own will. I have assisted in the administration to the dying sick—when I was not voice—where the Spirit manifested to me that this individual was not going to live despite the words pronounced by the Priesthood holder. A few days later the man who was the recipient of the administration

² JD, Vol.19, p.108 – p.109 – p.110, George Q. Cannon, September 23, 1877. Emphasis added.

³ JD, Vol.24, p.287 – p.288, Franklin D. Richards, October 6, 1883 and JD, Vol.24, p.340, Franklin D. Richards, October 6th, 1883. Emphasis added.

¹ JD, Vol.18, p.143, Orson Pratt, August 30, 1875.

died. We ought to always prefer the blessing that the Lord wishes to pour upon our heads than the blessing of a man. Part of the challenge here, is that we can—and I know I also have—confuse an outpouring of the Spirit for a *yes* answer. Sometimes it means, “*Do not fear, this matter is in My hands. I wish you to be comforted.*” ¶ *And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came unto him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live.* It is no small matter for a Prophet of God to receive revelation and be told that a person is appointed to death and go and tell an individual to put his house in order. I have long since learned, however, that when someone has been warned about an impending danger (in a prophetic dream or in some other way), that through prayer these things can be averted when it is the will of the Lord. In fact, this is why these things are often revealed ahead of time. ¶ Gill says: “*And said unto him, thus saith the Lord, set thine house in order*] – or, ‘give orders to thine house’: to the men of thine house, as the Targum; his domestics, his counsellors and courtiers, what they should do after his death; how his personal estate should be disposed of; how the throne should be filled up; who should succeed him, since he had no son: the family and secular affairs of men should be put in order, and direction given for the management of them, and their substance and estates should be disposed of by will before their death; and much more a concern should be shown for the setting in order their spiritual affairs, or that they may be habitually ready for death and eternity.”

2 Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the LORD,

Hezekiah descended in full humility of faith and prayer unto the Lord. Gill continues: “Literally, either to the wall of his bedchamber where he lay sick, that his tears might not be seen, and his prayers interrupted, and that he might deliver them with more privacy, freedom, and fervency; or else to the wall of the temple, as the Targum, towards which good men used to look when they prayed, 1Kings 8:38, which was a type of Christ, to whom we should have respect in all our petitions, as being the only Mediator between God and man.”

3 And said, Remember now, O LORD, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done [that which is] good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore. ✓

✓ with great weeping [i.e., And Hezekiah wept with great weeping]

And said, Remember now, O LORD, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done [that which is] good in thy sight. When I was Branch President of the Modesto 12th Spanish Branch, in California, one of our dear sisters had a prophetic dream that her family would get into a car accident on the way home from a Branch activity in the mountains. She did not mention this to me at the time and had the accident precisely in the spot she had seen in her dreams. When the Lord shows us through the Spirit—in any of the many possible manifestations—that something will go wrong, it is done for a purpose. All things being equal, it means, this thing will come to pass. But, if we pray to God and ask if it is possible for this bad thing we have been warned off, that it may not come to pass, and the Spirit reassures us that our prayer has been heard, it means this thing will *not* come to pass. This is my testimony which I have seen come true countless times. But the answer will not always be affirmative. At times we have to make different plans. For instance, one of the General Authorities had a bad feeling about his son going on a Church Boy Scout trip. At the end he was impressed by the Spirit—as was his son—that the trip ought to be avoided. This probably saved his life. Nevertheless, we have to ask. We have to pray. We have to inquire of God. This is what Hezekiah did, being filled with faith and hope. And that is not all, King Hezekiah was also filled with a confidence that he had walked uprightly before the Lord. This is why he reminds God that he had *walked before God in truth and with a perfect heart* (see ISAIAH 58:6–14). ¶ My daughter-in-law, Terry, once went into a temple recommend meeting with a counselor in her Stake Presidency. When asked the last question about whether she was worthy of that temple recommend, this counselor asked her not to answer that question for herself but to permit the Spirit to do so. Terry was filled with the Spirit, which testified to her that she was able to answer in the affirmative. This wise Church leader did much good as this knowledge served as a comfort at a turbulent time in her life. Indeed, she knew she had walked before God in truth and with a perfect heart. ¶ *And Hezekiah wept sore.* There are many types so weeping. One of them is because of sadness; another is because we are filled by the Spirit of God. In Hezekiah’s case, no doubt both of these sentiments were mixed and hard to separate. What is absolutely clear, is that he prayed with fervor and with faith and as moved by the Spirit, and as a result, the Lord God heard his prayer.

4 Then came the word* of the LORD to Isaiah, saying,

* 2 Kings 20:4, such things as grow of themselves.

The answer to King Hezekiah’s petition was received by Isaiah, as recorded in 2 Kings 20:4, “And it came to pass, *afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court*, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying.” Upon hearing Hezekiah’s petition, then, the Lord speaks to the Prophet Isaiah who is to transmit his answer to Hezekiah. This was a common way in the past to receive answers to prayer, through a mediator. The prophet often acted as a mediator to deliver the prayer as well as to receive the answer. We often see this pattern in the D&C, where early Church members approached the Prophet Joseph Smith to inquire something of God. The answer from the Lord was delivered to the Prophet (see, for instance, D&C 12, 23, 51). Sometimes, when we attend a conference or other Church meeting or class, some of our questions may be answered by an inspired teacher or class participant. This happened to me numerous Sundays as a relatively new member of the Church, when I attended the Orinda Ward Gospel Doctrine class taught by a very inspired teacher. Answers can come through Patriarchal Blessings, other blessings, through the mouths of children, and multiple other ways. And of course, answers can come directly as a result of prayer, in the very act of praying. A final point here about prayer, it is not at all unusual for someone to pray to God and immediately have his or her prayers answered by a servant of the Lord who is sent there for that very purpose. The Prophet was there to help deliver an answer to a prayer he most probably did not even know was taking place. That, in itself, would probably help Hezekiah strengthen his testimony that his prayer was heard. ¶ We, too, can be the answer to the prayers and needs of others. One of my favorite stories from President Thomas S. Monson includes one such circumstance: “Late one afternoon I was swimming at the Deseret Gym, gazing at the ceiling while backstroking width after width,” President Monson shared. “Silently, but ever so clearly, there came to my mind the thought: ‘Here you swim almost effortlessly, while your friend Stan languishes in his hospital bed, unable to move.’ I felt the prompting: ‘Get to the hospital and give him a blessing.’ I ceased my swimming, dressed, and hurried to Stan’s room at the hospital. His bed was empty. A nurse said he was in his wheelchair at the swimming pool, preparing for therapy. I hurried to the area, and there was Stan, all alone, at the edge of the deeper portion of the pool. We greeted one another and returned to his room, where a priesthood blessing was provided. Slowly but surely, strength and movement returned to Stan’s legs. First he could stand on faltering feet. Then he learned once again to walk—step by step. Today one would not know that Stan had lain so close to death and with no hope of recovery. Frequently Stan speaks in Church meetings and tells of the goodness of the Lord to him. To some he reveals the

dark thoughts of depression which engulfed him that afternoon as he sat in his wheelchair at the edge of the pool, sentenced, it seemed, to a life of despair. He tells how he pondered the alternative. It would be so easy to propel the hated wheelchair into the silent water of the deep pool. Life would then be over. But at that precise moment he saw me, his friend. That day Stan learned literally that we do not walk alone. I, too, learned a lesson that day: Never, never, never postpone following a prompting.” ¶ In my life Sergio R. Vargas Barria, President of the Puerto Montt Stake, has been such a voice of comfort from the Lord. These last couple of years have been challenging to Linda & me with the death—and all that lead to it—of our oldest son David. After each of the trying news along the way, Presidente Sergio Vargas inquired after us *before* he knew why he was calling. The Lord inspired him to do so. It was the Lord’s way of telling us—“*You are not alone, I am with you!*”⁴

5 Go, and say to Hezekiah,* Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years.**

* 2 Kings 20:5, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people.

** 2 Kings 20:5, behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the LORD.

Go, and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: As the margin ¶ has, “turn again,” שׁוּב, or simply *return*. The prophet had left Hezekiah’s presence and was now told to return to him. The words the Prophet speaks are those of the Lord. The Lord, *the God of David thy father* אֱלֹהֵי דָוִד (אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתָיִם) also means *ancestor*). The message is that God has both heard Hezekiah’s prayer and seen the sincerity of the tears. ¶ *David*, דָּוִד. I cannot think about the righteous David as a youth and not be filled with the most immense pain. Beside David’s well-known transgression regarding Bathsheba and Uriah, the Holy Scriptures do not hide from us many of his other faults, including a self-centered, vengeful personality that he developed after his fall. As I dig deep into my soul I realize that it is precisely because I loved young David so much and because he was such a great example of righteous living and inspiration, that his fall seems so particularly

⁴ This note was added 15 July 2017, as I was revising this manuscript before compiling it into a single volume—instead of the individual chapters which I began to post in 2000.

excruciating. Because also, as the quote goes, I can say, “There but for the grace of God, go I.” We know that David “sought [forgiveness] carefully with tears” (Hebrews 12:17). We further read: “[David] *hath fallen from his exaltation*, and received his portion; and he shall not inherit them out of the world, for I gave them unto another, saith the Lord” (D&C 132:39, *emphasis added*). The Prophet Joseph Smith taught: “Even David must wait for those times of refreshing, before he can come forth and his sins be blotted out. For Peter, speaking of him says, ‘David hath not yet ascended into heaven, for his sepulchre is with us to this day.’ His remains were then in the tomb.”⁵ One of our Church manuals has: “Even though David forfeited his exaltation because he arranged the death of Uriah, we can learn from his repentant attitude as he sought forgiveness for the sin of adultery. His words in Psalm 51 teach many aspects of true repentance.”⁶ When I think about all of these things, I think of the scripture in the Book of Mormon: “Condemn me not because of mine imperfection, neither my father, because of his imperfection, neither them who have written before him; but rather give thanks unto God that he hath made manifest unto you our imperfections, that ye may learn to be more wise than we have been” (Mormon 9:31). Now, returning to David, he was not only a great king, but he was also a prophet—one to whom great things were entrusted to. It was through David that the Lord chose to give numerous Messianic prophecies of infinite worth. ¶ *Behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years.* Rawlinson has: “This was doubling, or rather more than doubling, the length of Hezekiah’s reign, and allowing him a length of life exceeding that of the great majority of the kings of Judah, who seldom attained the age of fifty. Hezekiah lived to be fifty-four.”

6 And I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria: and I will defend this city.*

* 2 Kings 20:6, I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David’s sake.

NOTE: the narrative in Isaiah is in a different order than in 2 Kings. See ISAIAH 38:21–22, below, with the corresponding scriptures from 2 Kings, where it is a little easier to catch the chronology of the events. The exegetes suggest that this verse is either an assurance to Hezekiah that Assyria would not, in the future, capture Jerusalem, or that his sickness took place early enough where we had not yet seen the annihilation of the Assyrian army. ¶ *And I will deliver thee and this city*

⁵ TPJS, p. 188.

⁶ LDS *Old Testament Class Member Study Guide* (“Create in Me a Clean Heart”).

out of the hand of the king of Assyria: It is the Lord who can deliver us out of any predicament, and will prove us to see if we have put our trust in Him. ¶ Satan does not spend his time tempting us in areas that we are rock solid, but in those areas where we hesitate. For instance, if we have made the decision to go to Church every Sabbath day, and we have made that decision once and for all, we are less likely to be tempted in that area. When we have shown the Lord that we are committed to a principle, Satan soon tires of wasting his time on us in that area. We are, in the Lord’s side of the line. I know of families who have had trouble paying tithing. They keep hoping for a better day, for the sun to shine on them. And the promise of that day continues to shine, always in the distance, as when one travels toward a rainbow, or follows the moon in the night sky. Satan manages to cause havoc in their lives, wherein the money needs to be spent for this or that. When a person decides to pay tithing *no matter what*, once again, Satan generally loses interest in tempting that individual in this area. A person cannot get *prideful*, however, in the observance of any commandment, for Satan is not far. So it is with me, in the areas where I am weak, where I seem to make the decisions as I go; those are the areas where Satan often gets the best of me. President Kimball, when milking cows, came to the decision, “As I was out alone, milking the cows, or putting up the hay, I had time to think. I mulled it over in my mind and made this decision: ‘I, Spencer Kimball, will never touch tobacco. I will never drink coffee, nor will I ever touch tea—not because I can explain why I shouldn’t, except that the Lord said not to’” (Elder L. Tom Perry, *Ensign*, November 1979, p. 34.). No matter what, however, we need never lose faith in God’s ability to deliver us from the adversary. ¶ *And I will defend this city.* The Lord would hereby defend the city of Jerusalem. So it is that after we have been proved, then comes the blessing. The Lord is constantly telling us, “...prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it” (Malachi 3:10). This is a promise that goes not only for keeping the law of tithing, but for all things that the Lord commands.

7 And this [shall be] a sign unto thee from the LORD, that the LORD will do this thing that he hath spoken;

While it is clear that we ought not to ask for signs from the Lord, the Lord sometimes does give us signs (ISAIAH 7:14). And He sometimes expects us to put Him to the test as mentioned in Malachi 3:10 just quoted. Some exegetes suggest that Hezekiah had asked for this sign. But I believe this offering of a sign is a

pattern in God’s revelations to man. The Lord reveals a truth and then, while we are meditating on that truth, adds another truth or an instruction that turns out to be a sign. These are free gifts from God. These are part of His *tender mercies* (Psalm 25:6; 1Nephi 1:20).

8 Behold, I will bring again the shadow of the degrees, which is gone down in the sun dial^v of Ahaz, ten degrees backward. So the sun returned ten degrees, by which degrees it was gone down.*

^v degrees by, or, with the sun

* 2 Kings 20:9–11: And Isaiah said, This sign shalt thou have of the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that he hath spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees? 10 And Hezekiah answered, It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees: nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees. Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people. And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the LORD: and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz.

Behold, I will bring again the shadow of the degrees, which is gone down in the sun dial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward. Tanakh renders, “I am going to make the shadow on the steps, which has descended on the dial of Ahaz because of the sun, recede ten steps,” with a footnote by the word *dial*, indicating that “A model of a dial with steps has been discovered in Egypt.” It seems that Hezekiah was asked to choose, as we can see in 2 Kings, which direction the shadow should go, in the manifestation of this miracle. ¶ *So the sun returned ten degrees, by which degrees it was gone down.* In other words, the shade returned back ten steps. Barnes explains: “The shadow, or shade which is made by the interception of the rays of the sun by the gnomon on the dial. The phrase ‘bring again’ (Hebrew, **בְּשִׁיב**) means to cause to return (Hiphil, from **שָׁבַב**, to *return*); that is, I will cause it retrograde, or bring back. Septuagint, Στρέψω – ‘I will turn back.’” Rawlinson has: “Sun-dials are of several kinds. The one here spoken of seems to have consisted of a set of steps, with a perpendicular gnomon or pole at the top, the shadow of which receded up the steps as the sun rose in the heavens, and descended down them as the sun declined.”

vv. 9–22. Hezekiah composes a heartfelt hymn of gratitude and praise unto the Lord. Isaiah instructed Hezekiah to put on a poultice made out of figs upon the boil, as part of the healing process.

9 ¶ The writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick, and was recovered of his sickness:

As we see from time to time in Holy Writ, such as in the Song of Moses and the Song of Miriam (Exodus 15), people who have been blessed by the Lord burst out in songs of gratitude. So it was now with Hezekiah. He was grateful because he had recovered from his sickness. It says this was *written* [**כִּתְּבָה**] (Gesenius, HALOT)]. Delitzsch says: “The song which follows might be headed *Mikhtam* [from the Hebrew **מִכְתָּם**, meaning *inscription* (Gesenius, HALOT)], since it has the characteristics of this description of psalm (see at Psalm 16:1).” Cheyne calls it “a sweet and plaintive specimen of Hebrew psalmody.” One can sense the deep gratitude of Hezekiah.

10 I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave: I am deprived of the residue of my years.

The *cutting off of my days* means the end of his days. The word cutting is often a reference of the cutting off of a woven article from a loom (see ISAIAH 38:12). Hezekiah was already resigned and felt he was at the very gates of death and the grave—and was sad that he had not lived a normal length of life before he would have to face death. That his days were going to be cut short. AMP renders it: “I said, In the noontide and tranquility of my days I must depart; I am to pass through the gates of Sheol (the place of the dead), deprived of the remainder of my years.”

11 I said, I shall not see the LORD, [even] the LORD, in the land of the living: I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world.

Hezekiah says something so tender, which the English translation misses altogether, **לֹא־אֶרְאֶה יְהוָה יְהוָה**,” using the more tender abbreviated Tetragrammaton, *Yah* for Yahweh, and repeats it twice. I shall **not see Yahyah**. It makes me think of a tender *papi*, or *dada*. YLT renders it: “I said, I do not see Jah—Jah! In the land of the living.” Note that Hezekiah does not say he would **not see the Lord** anymore, but that he would not see Him *in the land of the living*. He had truly walked with the Lord in the land of the living, that is, in his lifetime. After expressing regret for not being able to see the Lord, he next expresses sadness for not being able to see his fellow mortals.

12 Mine age is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent: I have cut

off like a weaver my life: he will cut me off with pining sickness: ✓ from day [even] to night wilt thou make an end of me.

✓ or, from the thrum⁷

Mine age is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent: Just like a shepherd's tent is quickly removed from the very temporary spot it holds, so did Hezekiah feel his life was being cut short. Barnes well says: "As suddenly as the tent of a shepherd is taken down, folded up, and transferred to another place. There is doubtless the idea here that he would continue to exist, but in another place, as the shepherd would pitch his tent or dwell in another place. He was to be cut off from the earth, but he expected to dwell among the dead. The whole passage conveys the idea that he expected to dwell in another state—as the shepherd dwells in another place when he strikes his tent, and it is removed." ¶ *I have cut off like a weaver my life: he will cut me off with pining sickness:* When a knit work is moved from a loom, it is cut. Barnes explains: "This is another image designed to express substantially the same idea. The sense is, as a weaver takes his web from the loom by cutting the warp, or the threads which bind it to the beam, and thus loosens it and takes it away, so his life was to be cut off." Rawlinson well says: "*With pining sickness*] rather, as in the margin ||, from the thrum. The 'thrum' is the portion of the warp which adjoins the upper bar of the loom." In other words, removed quickly from the loom or from life. ASV renders this: "My dwelling is removed, and is carried away from me as a shepherd's tent: I have rolled up, like a weaver, my life; he will cut me off from the loom." ¶ *From day [even] to night wilt thou make an end of me.* This means all of a sudden, quickly. Several exegetes suggest that Hezekiah felt that his life would be taken within a single day. Night is symbolic for death and day for life. In the Book of Mormon we have: "And now, as I said unto you before, as ye have had so many witnesses, therefore, I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed" (Alma 34:33).

13 I reckoned till morning, [that], as a lion, so will he break all my bones: from day [even] to night wilt thou make an end of me.

⁷ "And cut from the thrum" (Tanakh). A thrum, as explained by Merriam-Webster, is "a fringe of warp threads left on the loom after the cloth has been removed."

The idea is here repeated as to the quickness with which Hezekiah felt his life was departing, and this pulling off the loom in the previous verse seemed to have been thought of as a very quick violent movement. This same thought is repeated by the lion who *break[s] all of my bones*.

14 Like a crane [or] a swallow, so did I chatter: I did mourn as a dove: mine eyes fail [with looking] upward: O LORD, I am oppressed; undertake for me. ✓

✓ or, ease me

It seems that Hezekiah was delirious with a fever and looking up solicitously to God for mercy. ¶ *O LORD, I am oppressed; undertake for me.* Or as in the margin ||, bring relief to my suffering pain.

15 What shall I say? he hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done [it]: I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul.

Barnes says, "*What shall I say?*" – This language seems to denote surprise and gratitude at unexpected deliverance. It is the language of a heart that is overflowing, and that wants words to express its deep emotions. In the previous verse he had described his pain, anguish, and despair. In this he records the sudden and surprising deliverance which God had granted; which was so great that no words could express his sense of it. Nothing could be more natural than this language; nothing would more appropriately express the feelings of a man who had been suddenly restored to health from dangerous sickness, and brought from the borders of the grave. *He hath both spoken unto me* – That is, he has promised. So the word is often used (Deuteronomy 26:17; Jeremiah 3:19). He had made the promise by the instrumentality of Isaiah (ISAIAH 38:5–6). The promise related to his recovery, to the length of his days, and to his entire deliverance from the hands of the Assyrians. *And himself hath done it* – He himself has restored me according to his promise, when no one else could have done it. *I shall go softly*] – The word used here (אָדָּבָר)⁸ occurs in but one other place in the Bible (Psalm 42:4): 'I went with them to the house of God;' that is, I went with them in a sacred procession to the house of God; I went with a solemn, calm, slow pace. The idea here is, 'I will go humbly, submissively, all my life; I will walk in a serious manner,

⁸ אָדָּבָר

remembering that I am traveling to the grave; I will avoid pride, pomp, and display; I will suffer the remembrance of my sickness, and of God's mercy to produce a calm, serious, thoughtful demeanour all my life.' This is the proper effect of sickness on a pious mind, and it is its usual effect. And probably, one design of God was to keep Hezekiah from the ostentatious parade usually attendant on his lofty station; from being elated with his deliverance from the Assyrian; from improper celebrations of that deliverance by revelry and pomp; and to keep him in remembrance, that though he was a monarch, yet he was a mortal man, and that he held his life at the disposal of God. *In the bitterness of my soul*] – I will remember the deep distress, the bitter sorrows of my sickness, and my surprising recovery; and will allow the remembrance of that to diffuse seriousness and gratitude over all my life.”

16 O Lord, by these [things men] live, and in all these [things is] the life of my spirit: so wilt thou recover me, and make me to live.

Gill writes: “*O Lord, by these things men live*] – Not by bread only, but by the word of God: by the promise of God, and by his power performing it; and by his favour and goodness continually bestowed; it is in him, and by his power and providence, that they live and move, and have their being, and the continuance of it; and it is his lovingkindness manifested to them that makes them live comfortably and go on cheerfully: *And in all these things is the life of my spirit*] – what kept his soul in life were the same things, the promise, power, and providence of God; what revived his spirit, and made him comfortable and cheerful, was the wonderful love and great goodness of God unto him, in appearing to him, and for him, and delivering him out of his sore troubles ... The Targum interprets it of the resurrection of the dead, ‘O Lord, concerning all the dead, thou hast said, that thou wilt quicken them; and before them all thou hast quickened my spirit:’ *So wilt thou recover me, and make me to live*] – or rather, ‘and’ or ‘for thou hast recovered (so Gataker) me, and made me to live’; for the Lord had not only promised it, but he had done it, ISAIAH 38:15, and so the Targum, ‘and hast quickened me, and sustained me.’”

17 Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: ✓ but thou hast in love to my soul [delivered it] from the pit ✓ of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.

- ✓ or, on my peace came great bitterness
- ✓ ✓ thou hast loved my soul from the pit

Elder Carlos E. Asay, using the *How beautiful are the feet principle* said: “Of those members and missionaries who act as agents of the Lord and assist others in escaping the pit, it will be said: ‘He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings’ (Psalm 40:2). ‘Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back’ (ISAIAH 38:17).”⁹ Rawlinson explains: “*For thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back*] Where they could be no more seen, and therefore would be no more remembered.” It is in essence, the idea found in Doctrine and Covenants: “Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more” (D&C 58:42).

18 For the grave cannot praise thee, death can [not] celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth.

President Joseph Fielding Smith defended the truth of the resurrection, after receiving the following question: “Critics of the resurrection and the existence of the spirit frequently quote from Ecclesiastes 9:4–10, particularly stressing verses 5 and 10—‘For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.’ ‘Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, no device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.’ And from ISAIAH 38:18: ‘For the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for the truth.’ Other references are quoted from Ezekiel 18:4 and 20: ‘The soul that sinneth, it shall die.’ What explanation can be offered for these verses?” In response, President Smith wrote: “The evidence of the resurrection is so abundant in the New Testament, that it is easy to meet the question so far as the resurrection is concerned. There are many promises in the Old Testament that there shall come a resurrection of the dead, and we are informed that at the resurrection of our Savior, the graves were opened and the dead came forth. There is no problem here. In relation to the thought that is given by some that there is no spirit in our bodies, and that when we die the body goes back to the dust there to remain forever, or perchance in the case of some, to

⁹ Asay, Carlos E. *The Seven M's of Missionary Service*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1996, p. 96.

receive a resurrection, there is ample biblical evidence that contradicts this thought. The writer of Ecclesiastes was speaking of this life only when he wrote these verses. The sixth verse of Ecclesiastes makes this clear: ‘Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun.’ The dead are soon forgotten. It is not long after a man is gone, no matter how renowned he may have been, he is forgotten; and things done ‘under the sun’ they who are dead are not any longer interested in, nor do they have any portion in them. A man cannot take with him any portion of this world’s goods, but as Job declared in substance: Naked came he into the world, and naked he goes out of it. This, however, does not prove, and evidently the writer in the Old Testament did not intend to prove, that there was no existence after death of the eternal spirit. The dead are forgotten by whom? By the living. In the consideration of this discourse by the Preacher, Solomon, it should be kept in mind that the entire discourse is in relation to vanity—the vanities of this life, and is not one considering the blessings and nature of eternity. He points out the blessings to be obtained by a righteous life, and the evils of a life of vanity. The thought behind his expression: ‘Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest,’ is an admonition to us all, to apply our time and our talents to doing good and to bringing to pass righteousness while we sojourn in this mortal life, for it will be impossible for us to mend our ways and seek to do the things that have been neglected, in the grave. The words of Solomon have by some been willfully or ignorantly distorted. The closing words of this discourse are: For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. The words of Amulek to the Nephites are worthy of our consideration at this point: ‘For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors.’ [And also quotes Alma 34:33, which I quoted above.] When it is understood properly, this discourse by Solomon is wonderful, faith-promoting, and should be considered in its true light by all. Unfortunately Solomon himself failed to heed its instruction.”¹⁰ So also Alexander who says: “It does not follow from these words either that Hezekiah had no expectation of a future state, or that the soul remains unconscious till the resurrection.”

¹⁰ Smith, Joseph Fielding. *Answers to Gospel Questions*. vols. 1–4. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957–1966. Vol. III, pp. 128–130.

19 The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I [do] this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth.

Alexander says: “Only the living could praise God in that way to which the writer was accustomed, and on which his eye is here fixed, with special reference, no doubt, to the external service of the temple.” Gill says, “*The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day*” – Every one of the living, or such who are both corporeally and spiritually alive; and therefore the word is repeated; none but such who are alive in a corporeal sense can praise the Lord in this world.” Barnes explains: “*The father to the children*” – One generation of the living to another. The father shall have so deep a sense of the goodness of God that he shall desire to make it known to his children, and to perpetuate the memory of it in the earth.”

20 The LORD [was ready] to save me: therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the LORD.

Rawlinson has: “*The Lord was ready to save me*” – rather, *came to my rescue; came and saved me. Therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments*] – rather, *therefore will we play my stringed instruments*. Hezekiah calls the stringed instruments his, because he had recalled their use, and re-established them as a part of the temple service after the suspension of that service by Ahaz (2 Chronicles 29:30). His intention now is to take continual part with the Levites in (the choral praises of God, which were a part of the daily worship of the temple. This is to him the natural mode of expressing his thankfulness to God for the mercy vouchsafed him.”

21 For Isaiah had said, Let them take a lump of figs, and lay [it] for a plaister upon the boil, and he shall recover.

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

The Prophet Isaiah had given instructions on what was to be done for Hezekiah to be cured. This is not uncommon. For instance, in relation to the Haun’s Mills Massacre, Amanda Smith was a witness to the most violent mob violence against the Saints. Her husband and one of her sons were killed. She tells us the story of how her son Alma was healed. We pick up in the middle of the narrative: “I seized my two little girls and

I ran down the bank and crossed the mill pond on a plank ... Another sister fled with me. Yet though we were women, with tender children, in flight for our lives, the demons poured volley after volley to kill us. A number of bullets entered my clothes, but I was not wounded. The sister, however, who was with me, cried out that she was hit. We had just reached the trunk of a fallen tree, over which I urged her, bidding her to shelter there where the bullets could not reach her, while I continued my flight to some bottom land. When the firing had ceased I went back to the scene of the massacre, for there were my husband and three sons, of whose fate I as yet knew nothing ... Passing on I came to a scene more terrible still to the mother and wife. Emerging from the blacksmith shop was my eldest son, bearing on his shoulders his little brother Alma. 'Oh ! My Alma is dead!' I cried, in anguish. 'No, mother; I think Alma is not dead. But father and brother Sardius are killed!' ... But I could not weep then. The fountain of tears was dry; the heart overburdened with its calamity, and all the mother's sense absorbed in its anxiety for the precious boy which God alone could save by his miraculous aid. The entire hip joint of my wounded boy had been shot away. Flesh, hip bone, joint and all had been ploughed out from the muzzle of the gun which the ruffian placed to the child's hip through the logs of the shop and deliberately fired. We laid little Alma on a bed in our tent and I examined the wound. It was a ghastly sight. I knew not what to do. [She then speaks of the tremendous carnage that had taken place.] Yet was I there, all that long, dreadful night, with my dead and my wounded, and none but God as our physician and help. 'Oh my Heavenly Father,' I cried, 'what shall I do? Thou seest my poor wounded boy and knowest my inexperience. Oh Heavenly Father direct me what to do!' And then I was directed as by a voice speaking to me. The ashes of our fire was still smouldering. We had been burning the bark of the shag-bark hickory. I was directed to take those ashes and make a lye and put a cloth saturated with it right into the wound. It hurt, but little Alma was too near dead to heed it much. Again and again I saturated the cloth and put it into the hole from which the hip-joint had been ploughed, and each time mashed flesh and splinters of bone came away with the cloth; and the wound became as white as chicken's flesh. Having done as directed I again prayed to the Lord and was again instructed as distinctly as though a physician had been standing by speaking to me. Nearby was a slippery-elm tree. From this I was told to make a slippery-elm poultice and fill the wound with it. My eldest boy was sent to get the slippery-elm from the roots, the poultice was made, and the wound, which took fully a quarter of a yard of linen to cover, so large was it, was properly dressed. [Only after having performed these things did Amanda Smith permit herself to weep. When the morning came the

living did what they could for the many wounded—to 'soothe the sufferers' wants.' They could not bury the dead because the mob was expected to reappear any time.] But to return to Alma, and how the Lord helped me to save his life. I removed the wounded boy to a house, some distance off, the next day, and dressed his hip; the Lord directing me as before. I was reminded that in my husband's trunk there was a bottle of balsam. This I poured into the wound, greatly soothing Alma's pain. 'Alma, my child,' I said, 'you believe that the Lord made your hip?' 'Yes, mother.' 'Well, the Lord can make something there in the place of your hip; don't you believe he can, Alma?' 'Do you think that the Lord can, mother?' inquired the child, in his simplicity. 'Yes, my son,' I replied, 'he has shown it all to me in a vision.' Then I laid him comfortably on his face, and said: 'Now you lay like that, and don't move, and the Lord will make you another hip.' So Alma laid on his face for five weeks, until he was entirely recovered—a flexible gristle having grown in place of the missing joint and socket, which remains to this day a marvel to physicians. On the day that he walked again I was out of the house fetching a bucket of water, when I heard screams from the children. Running back, in affright, I entered, and there was Alma on the floor, dancing around, and the children screaming in astonishment and joy. It is now nearly forty years ago, but Alma has never been the least crippled during his life, and he has traveled quite a long period of the time as a missionary of the gospel and a living miracle of the power of God. I cannot leave the tragic story without relating some incidents of those five weeks when I was a prisoner with my wounded boy in Missouri, near the scene of the massacre, unable to obey the order of extermination [That is, to leave Missouri]. All the Mormons in the neighborhood had fled out of the State, excepting a few families of the bereaved women and children who had gathered at the house of Brother David Evans, two miles from the scene of the massacre. To this house Alma had been carried after that fatal night. In our utter desolation, what could we women do but pray? Prayer was our only source of comfort; our Heavenly Father our only helper. None but he could save and deliver us. One day a mobber came from the mill with the captain's fiat: 'The captain says if you women don't stop your d—d praying he will send down a posse and kill every d—d one of you!' And he might as well have done it, as to stop us poor women praying in that hour of our great calamity. Our prayers were hushed in terror. We dared not let our voices be heard in the house in supplication. I could pray in my bed or in silence, but I could not live thus long. This godless silence was more intolerable than had been that night of the massacre. I could bear it no longer. I pined to hear once more my own voice in petition to my Heavenly Father. I stole down into a corn-field, and crawled into a stout of

corn. It was as the temple of the Lord to me at that moment. I prayed aloud and most fervently. When I emerged from the corn a voice spoke to me. It was a voice as plain as I ever heard one. It was no silent, strong impression of the spirit, but a voice, repeating a verse of the saint's hymn: 'That soul who on Jesus hath leaned for repose, I cannot, I will not desert to its foes; That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake, I'll never, no never, no never forsake!' From that moment I had no more fear."¹¹ ¹² ¶ In Chile compresses are sometimes made with eucalyptus. Here in Isaiah, with figs. Barnes says: "Let them take a lump of figs] – The word used here (דבילה) denotes 'a round cake' of dried figs pressed together in a mass [Samuel 25:18. Figs were thus pressed together for preservation, and for convenience of conveyance. And lay it for a plaster] – The word used here (מרר) denotes properly to rub, bruise, crush by rubbing; then to rub, in, to anoint, to soften. Here it means they were to take dried figs and lay them softened on the ulcer. Upon the boil] – (משחיין). This word means a burning sore or an inflamed ulcer (Exodus 9:9, 11; Leviticus 13:18–20). The verb in Arabic means to be hot, inflamed; to ulcerate ... Here it probably denotes a pestilential boil; an eruption, or inflamed ulceration produced by the plague, that threatened immediate death."

22 Hezekiah also had said, What [is] the sign that I shall go up to the house of the LORD?

* 2 Kings 20:8, And Hezekiah said unto Isaiah, What [shall be] the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I shall go up into the house of the LORD the third day?

As in the time of the Book of Mormon, with no word processors, it was difficult enough to engrave or write, that an afterthought that belonged earlier would simply have to stay as an afterthought. When written in Kings and Chronicles, they had the luxury of being able to go back and put it in the correct order. Rawlinson said: "Hezekiah also had said]; literally, *and Hezekiah said*. Our translators, both in this verse and at the commencement of ISAIAH 38:21 have endeavoured to conceal the awkwardness of the *nexus*, or rather want of *nexus*, with what precedes, by a modification of the rendering. The true sense is brought out by the proceeding, which is, however, a little arbitrary." Indeed, as noted by Rawlinson, we have a simple expression: ויאמר חזקיהו. The literal expression is *and-'he'-said-Hizkiyahu*, where the 'yod acts as a 'he'-marker alerts the reader to look for the name of a person to substitute for it, here Hezekiah.

9 September 2013

¹¹ Tullidge, Edward W. (1877) *The Women of Mormondom*, Chapter 15, New York. I urge the reading of the whole narrative.

¹² Baugh, Alexander. (2011). Made some slight corrections to the above narrative from Alexander Baugh's paper: Chapter Twenty-Six. "'I'll Never Forsake': Amanda Barnes Smith (1809–1886)," in *Women of Faith in the Latter Days*: Volume 1, 1775–1820, ed. Richard E. Turley Jr. and Brittany A. Chapman. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011, 327–42.

