

## Isaiah Chapter 38, Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes

### Hezekiah's Illness, His Psalm, and His Recovery<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Motyer entitles **38:1-39:8** "Historical prologue: Hezekiah's fatal choice."

He comments that "The events in these chapters pre-date those in **chapters 36-37** by some years...They cover three matters: Hezekiah's illness (**38:1-8**); the personal record he made of his thoughts when he faced death and when he was healed (**38:9-22**); and the account of the embassy sent by Merodach-Baladan of Babylon (**39:1-8**)..."

"Hezekiah was one of the most truly human of the kings, and his portrait here accords with what is recorded elsewhere. He was a man whose heart was genuinely moved towards the Lord but whose will was fickle under the pressures and temptations of life." (P. 290)

Slotki summarizes **chapter 38** as containing the story of: "Hezekiah's serious illness, his prayer to God, the Divine promise of a prolongation of his life and Hezekiah's thanksgiving. A parallel version with slight variations and the omission of Hezekiah's psalm of thanksgiving (**verses 9-20**) is **2 Kings 20:1-11**." (P. 178)

Alexander states that "This chapter contains an account of Hezekiah's illness and miraculous recovery, together with a psalm which he composed in commemoration of his sufferings and deliverance. The parallel passage (**2 Kings 20:1-11**) varies more from that before us than in the preceding chapter. So far as they are parallel, the narrative in **Kings** is more minute and circumstantial, and at the same time more exactly chronological in its arrangement. On the other hand, the psalm is wholly wanting in that passage. All these circumstances favor the conclusion that the text before us is the first draught [British spelling for 'draft'], and other [**2 Kings 20:1-11**] a repetition by the hand of the same writer." (P. 75)

Oswalt entitles **38:1-39:8** "The Human Limits of Trust."

He comments that "**Chapters 38-39** serve to introduce **chapters 40-66**, which focus upon the Babylonian captivity...But **chapters 38** and **39** are also pivotal. For the question must be asked, 'If Hezekiah is the ideal representative of the trusting people, why the captivity?' Or, 'If God could deliver His people from Assyria, why not from Babylon?' Or, 'Is not Hezekiah the promised child of **7:14** and **9:5-6<sup>Heb</sup> / 6-7<sup>Eng</sup>**? Is he not in fact the Messiah?' **Chapters 38-39** answer these questions for us and in so doing point beyond Hezekiah and the Jerusalem of 700 B.C.E. Thus the relation of these chapters to **chapters 36** and **37** may be logical rather than chronological." (P. 672)

Oswalt entitles **38:1-22** "Hezekiah's Illness," and entitles **verses 1-8** "Prophecy and response."

(continued...)

<sup>1</sup>(...continued)

He comments that “**Chapter 38** presents Hezekiah in two lights: positive and negative. On the one hand, he is still the Hezekiah who can turn to God in submission and trust in a moment of dire necessity. But on the other hand, he is a Hezekiah who is distinctly mortal...The promises which were made through Isaiah and recorded in...**chapters 7-12** had not been fulfilled in Hezekiah, and more revelation would be necessary in order to understand to whom they did refer. This man might be given fifteen years by God’s grace, but he is only a man, not the Messiah.

“**Chapter 39** is wholly negative. Hezekiah, like Jerusalem, is all too easily diverted from his trust when the pressure is removed. All too easily God’s people are seduced by this world’s values and put their trust in human glory—wealth, arms, luxuries—when all along we live and prosper by God’s good pleasure alone. Hezekiah demonstrates that trust must be a way of life and not merely a one-time affair...

“Thus **chapters 36-39** make **chapters 40-66** a necessity. Given that God may be trusted, what then? Given that salvation is not in Hezekiah, where is it?...

“The form of **chapter 38**, as it appears here, is somewhat enigmatic. Almost all commentators, whatever their critical persuasions, agree that **2 Kings 20:1-11** preserves a better account of the story in that it is fuller and has a more logical sequence of events. It appears that the writer of the **Isaiah** account, abridging the original (perhaps to gain room for the psalm he wished to include?) inadvertently left out the reference to Isaiah’s poultice and Hezekiah’s request for a sign (**2 Kings 20:7-8**). He then added these on at the end of the account (It is also possible that a later editor, knowing of the **Kings** account, felt that these details were important and added them at the end. If so, this was done very early since both [the Greek translation, **Rahlfs**] and the Aramaic Targum preserve the same form).” (Pp. 672-73)

Watts states that in **chapter 38, verses 1-8 and 21-22**, “The story of Hezekiah’s illness is made a part of this complex narrative by the phrase ‘in those days’ (**verse 1**) and by the position of **verse 6** which repeats the promise of **Isaiah 37:35** concerning the city and expands it to include the King...

“The story in **2 Kings 20** is shorter in omitting the psalm [of Hezekiah], but longer in the narrative of the sign. The miracles of such an immediate response to prayer and of the sign appears to be more important to the account in **Kings**. The presentation of Hezekiah’s attitude is more important to the **Isaiah** text.” (Pp. 50-51)

<sup>2</sup>**Rahlfs** interpolates the phrase ἐγένετο δὲ, “But then it happened,” at the beginning of **verse 1**.

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 1**: “*In those days Hezekiah was sick unto death, and Isaiah the son of Amoz, the prophet, came to him, and said to him,*

(continued...)

וַיְבֹא אֵלָיו יְשַׁעְיָהוּ בֶן-אֲמוּץ הַנְּבִיא

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו כֹּה-אָמַר יְהוָה

צוֹ לְבֵיתְךָ

כִּי מֵת אַתָּה וְלֹא תַחִיָּה:

In those days,<sup>3</sup> Hezekiah<sup>4</sup> was sick, to death;<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>(...continued)

*Thus saith Jehovah, Order thy house, for thou (art) dying, and art not to live...*

“As Hezekiah survived this sickness fifteen years (**verse 5**), and reigned in all twenty-nine (**2 Kings 18:2**), those days must be restricted to the fourteenth year, which was that of the Assyrian invasion...It is altogether natural...that the prophet, after carrying the history of to its conclusion, should go back to complete that of Hezekiah also.” (P. 75)

Motyer states that “On precise reckoning from a presumed death of Hezekiah in 687 B.C.E., the fifteen extra years granted in **verse 5** would date the sickness in 702 B.C.E. Since Merodach-Baladan’s second period as King of Babylon...ended in his defeat at the hands of sometime in 702, this would necessitate the arrival of the envoys in the early part of that year.” (P. 291)

<sup>3</sup>Slotki comments on the phrase “In those days” that the story that follows occurred “before the catastrophe that had befallen the Assyrian hosts (compare **verse 6**). Traditionally Hezekiah’s illness occurred three days before ’s fall. On the third day Hezekiah went up to the temple to offer his prayer; and on the same day, which was the first day of Passover, Sennacherib’s armies were miraculously destroyed while he himself fled to Nineveh.” (P. 178)

Oswalt states that “*In those days* is a point of considerable debate owing to the controversy concerning Hezekiah’s dates. If he began to reign in 716 / 15 B.C.E. and reigned for twenty-nine years (**2 Kings 18:2, 13**), then this event (whereby fifteen years were added [to his life], would have occurred around 701 B.C.E., at the time of Sennacherib’s invasion. In this case **chapters 36-39** would be in approximate chronological order...On the other hand, if Hezekiah began to reign in 727 / 26 B.C.E. (**2 Kings 18:1**), his death would have occurred in 696 B.C.E. and his illness must be dated fifteen years earlier, about 711 B.C.E. In this case **chapters 38** and **39** would be placed where they are for ideological reasons...

“On balance the latter alternative seems slightly more likely. It appears that Hezekiah did begin to reign in 727 / 726 B.C.E., probably as co-regent with his father

(continued...)

and Isaiah,<sup>6</sup> son of Amots, the spokesperson, came to him;  
and he said to him, In this way YHWH spoke:  
Give command<sup>7</sup> to your household,<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>(...continued)

Ahaz. Furthermore, the Babylonian rebel Merodach-baladan seems to have been out of the picture by 703 B.C.E...

“Furthermore...most of the temple treasures were stripped to pay the initial, abortive tribute to Sennacherib, leaving nothing to show the Babylonians if they came after that time. [See **2 Kings 18:14-16**:

And Hezekiah, King of Judah sent to the King of Assyria at Lachish, saying, I have done wrong; withdraw from me. Whatever you impose on me, I will bear. And the King of Assyria required of Hezekiah, King of Judah, three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. And Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house / temple of YHWH, and in the treasuries of the King’s house. At that time Hezekiah stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of YHWH and from the doorposts that Hezekiah King of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the King of Assyria.]

“Finally, the dates of the Babylonian revolutionary Merodach-baladan... seem to confirm that the sickness did not occur after Sennacherib’s attack, but before it.” (Pp. 674-75)

<sup>4</sup>Where our Hebrew text spells the King’s name חִזְקִיָּהוּ, **chizqiyyahu, 1QIs<sup>a</sup>** spells it חִזְקִיָּה, **chizqiyyah**.

<sup>5</sup>Alexander states that “לְמוֹתָ” strictly means *to die*, i.e. so as to be ready to die, or at the point of death.” (P. 75)

<sup>6</sup>Where our Hebrew text spells the prophet’s name יֵשַׁעְיָהוּ, **yesha(yahu, 1QIs<sup>a</sup>** spells it יֵשַׁעְיָה, **yesha(yah**.

<sup>7</sup>Where our Hebrew text has the piel imperative masculine singular command צַו, “command!”, **1QIs<sup>a</sup>** spells it צוֹי, while sometimes in the **Hebrew Bible** it is spelled צוּה.

<sup>8</sup>Slotki’s translation of the imperative verb צַו, “command!” has “set thy house in order,” and he comments that this is literally “give instruction to thy house.” He adds that “The phrase denotes the last instruction to be given by a dying man.” (P. 178)

(continued...)

Because you are dying, and you will not live.<sup>9</sup>

38:2<sup>10</sup> וַיִּסַּב חֶזְקִיָּהוּ פָּנָיו אֶל-הַקִּיּוֹר

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<sup>8</sup>(...continued)

Alexander states that “*Order thy house* is ambiguous, both in Hebrew and in English.” It may mean “Give order with respect to thy house (τάξαι περὶ τοῦ οἴκου σου),” or it may mean “Order or command thy household, i.e. make known to them thy last will.” “In either case, the general idea is that of a final settling of his affairs, in the prospect of death. Compare **2 Samuel 17:23** [where Ahithophel ‘commanded his house’ before hanging himself and dying].” (P. 75)

Also, see **1 King 2:1-9**, King David’s final instructions.

<sup>9</sup>Oswalt comments that the words, “You will not live!” must have “sounded to Hezekiah like the final hammer blows on the nails of his coffin. They seem final and without apparent reprieve...

“It is evident that Hezekiah knew something of God’s character that Moses also knew (**Exodus 32:7-14**): God is always ready to be entreated. He is unchanging in His intention to bless His creatures and is willing to change His word if people turn to Him in intensity of faith.” (P. 675)

See **Jonah 4:2**,

And [Jonah] prayed to YHWH, and he said,

Ah now, YHWH—was this not my word when I was still upon my ground /  
home-land;

therefore I confronted to flee to Tarshish;

because I knew that You—

a gracious and compassionate God,

long of nose(s) / long-suffering, and great (in) steadfast-love,

and One being compassionate / repenting over the evil [You have threatened].

<sup>10</sup>Motyer entitles **verses 2-3** “Prayer and tears.” He states that “Hezekiah came to the Lord with prayer, an appeal to his good record and tears...It is clear that Hezekiah came short of understanding the simple reality of faith expressing itself in prayer, resorting also to the bargaining power of good works...

**2 Chronicles 32:1** notes ruefully that ‘after all that Hezekiah had so faithfully done’ (the truly magnificent work of religious reform; **2 Chronicles 29-31**) Sennacherib arrived!...Sennacherib would not have come had Hezekiah kept himself free from the worldly expedient of arms, alliances and rebellion...[It is] an indication too of the kindly mercy of the Lord that He hears our prayers even when they rest on false assumptions.” (P. 291)

(continued...)

וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אֶל־יְהוָה:

And Hezekiah<sup>11</sup> turned his face<sup>12</sup> to the wall,<sup>13</sup>  
and he prayed to YHWH.

38:3<sup>14</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי יְהוָה

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<sup>10</sup>(...continued)

Oswalt states that “The effect of Isaiah’s words upon the King is apparent in his response: he turned his fact to the wall and burst into tears. He was completely devastated and withdrew into himself. Ahab had had a similar reaction years earlier when his desire for Naboth’s vineyard had seem frustrated (**1 Kings 21:4**)...

“Hezekiah’s reponse is instructive. He does not withdraw completely, for he does not withdraw from God. Neither does he rage against God nor does he demand that God heal him in payment for ‘services rendered.’ Rather, he simply pours out the feelings of a wounded heart to a heavenly Father. No father’s heart can be unaffected by such a cry. Nor was God’s.” (P. 676)

Alexander translates **verse 2**: “*And Hezekiah turned his face to the wall, and prayed to Jehovah.*” He comments that “The obvious meaning is the wall of the room, towards which he turned, not merely to collect his thoughts, or to conceal his tears, but as a natural expression of strong feeling. As Ahab turned his face toward the wall in anger, so Hezekiah does the same in grief.” (P. 76)

<sup>11</sup>The parallel passage (**2 Kings 20:2**) omits the name Hezekiah. **1QIs<sup>a</sup>** again uses the short form of the name Isaiah (see footnote 6).

<sup>12</sup>Where our Hebrew text has וַיִּסַּב חֲזָקִיהוּ פָּנָיו, “and Hezekiah turned his face,” the parallel passage (**2 Kings 20:2**) interpolates the sign of the direct object, וַיִּסַּב חֲזָקִיהוּ אֶת פָּנָיו.

<sup>13</sup>Slotki states that Hezekiah’s turning his face to the wall means that he turned “away from the people gathered around his bed...to concentrate his thoughts and commune alone with his Creator.” (P. 178)

Oswalt notes that the Aramaic Targum has it as “the wall of the sanctuary, but there is no reason to take it as other than the wall of his sickroom.” (P. 671)

<sup>14</sup>Alexander translates **verse 3**: “*And he said, Ah Jehovah, remember, I beseech Thee, how I have walked before Thee in truth and with a whole heart, and that which is good in Thine eyes I have done; and Hezekiah wept a great weeping.*”

He comments that “The figure of walking before God includes the ideas of communion with Him and subjection to Him, and is therefore more comprehensive than

(continued...)

זָכַר-נָא אֶת אֲשֶׁר הִתְהַלַּכְתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ  
 בְּאֵמֶת וּבְלֵב שָׁלֵם  
 וְהַטּוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ עָשִׂיתִי

וַיִּבֶךְ חֲזָקָתוֹ בְּכִי גָדוֹל:

And he said,<sup>15</sup> Ah now,<sup>16</sup> YHWH!

Please remember how I walked<sup>17</sup> before You  
 in true faithfulness<sup>18</sup> and with a whole heart,<sup>19</sup>  
 and I did what was good in Your eyes!

<sup>14</sup>(...continued)

the kindred phrase of walking with Him. By truth we are here to understand sincerity and constancy.” (P. 76)

What do you think? Do you see any difference between “walking before God” and “walking with God”? We do not.

<sup>15</sup>Where our Hebrew text has the phrase וַיֹּאמֶר, “and he said,” the parallel passage (2 Kings 20:2) has the qal infinitive construct לֵאמֹר, “saying.”

<sup>16</sup>Alexander states that אָנָה is a strong expression of entreaty. It is more regularly written אָנָה. (P. 76) He holds that the phrase is derived from אָה and נָא.

<sup>17</sup>Where our Hebrew text has the hithpael verb הִתְהַלַּכְתִּי, “I walked about / lived,” 1QIs<sup>a</sup> has the qal perfect, הִלַּכְתִּי, “I walked,” but the copyist has added the letters הַת above the line, showing that he knew of the hithpael reading.

<sup>18</sup>Watts states the אֵמֶת means “what is firm of solid...In this context it means integrity and truth.” (P. 51) We translate by “true faithfulness.” See the article by A. Jepsen in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* I, pp. 309-16.

<sup>19</sup>Where our Hebrew text has the phrase וּבְלֵב שָׁלֵם, “and with a whole heart,” the parallel passage (2 Kings 20:32) and 1QIs<sup>a</sup> both have וּבְלִבְבֵּי שָׁלֵם, using the longer form of the noun “heart,” with two *beths* rather than only one.

And Hezekiah wept,<sup>20</sup> a great weeping.<sup>21</sup>

38:4<sup>22</sup> וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־יִשְׁעִיָּהוּ לֵאמֹר:

And YHWH's word was / came to Isaiah saying:<sup>23</sup>

38:5<sup>24</sup> הַלֹּךְ וְאָמַרְתָּ אֶל־חֲזִקְיָהוּ

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<sup>20</sup>Where our Hebrew text has the phrase וַיִּבְכֶּה, “and he wept,” 1QIs<sup>a</sup> spells ויבכה.

<sup>21</sup>Watts translates by “with great sobs.”

<sup>22</sup>Motyer entitles **verses 4-8** “The word and the sign.”

He comments that “The ground on which prayer is answered is not human faithfulness (**verse 3**) but the faithfulness of the God of your father David (**verse 5**)...Yet He says I have heard your prayer. The actual intercession of Hezekiah was intrinsic to the situation.” (P. 291)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 4**: “*And the word of Jehovah was (or came) to Isaiah, saying* (what follows in the next verse). Calvin supposes a considerable time to have elapsed before this second message was sent; but he seems to have overlooked the more particular statement in the parallel passage (**2 Kings 20:4**), that the word of the Lord came to him before he had gone out of the middle court (according to the *qeri*), or the middle city (according to the *kethibh*)...In either case, the interval could not have been a long one, though sufficient to try the faith of Hezekiah.” (Pp. 76-77)

<sup>23</sup>The parallel passage, **2 Kings 20:4**, has a longer text, interpolating the clause וַיְהִי יִשְׁעִיָּהוּ לֹא יֵצֵא (הָעִיר) [חֲצֵר] הַתְּיִכְנָה, “and it happened, Isaiah did not go out the middle city / the middle court,” before the words found here. Watts notes that this “heightens the sense of an immediate response to Hezekiah’s prayer.” (P. 50)

<sup>24</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 5**: “*Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith Jehovah, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears (or weeping); behold, I am adding (or about to add) unto thy days fifteen years.* The parallel passage (**2 Kings 20:5**) has: *return and say to Hezekiah, the chief (or leader) of My people, Thus saith Jehovah, etc. After tears it adds: behold, (I am) healing (or about to heal) thee; on the third day thou shalt go up to the house of Jehovah.*” (P. 77)

Oswalt comments that “Hezekiah’s recovery is not merely because God has changed His mind but because of His willingness to keep faith with those to whom He has committed Himself in the past (**Deuteronomy 4:37-38**).”

כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי דָוִד אָבִיךָ  
שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶת־תְּפִלָּתְךָ  
רָאִיתִי אֶת־דְּמָעָתְךָ  
הִנְנִי יוֹסֵף עַל־יָמֶיךָ חֲמֵשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה:

Go,<sup>25</sup> and you shall say to Hezekiah,<sup>26</sup>

In this way YHWH, God of David your father,<sup>27</sup> spoke:

I heard your prayer,

I saw your tear(s).<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Where our Hebrew text has the qal infinitive absolute, הֵלֹךְ, literally “going!” the parallel passage (2 Kings 20:5) has the qal imperative שׁוּב, “return!”

<sup>26</sup>The parallel passage (2 Kings 20:5) interpolates the phrase נְגִיד־עַמִּי, “leader of My people,” following the name Hezekiah.

<sup>27</sup>Slotki explains that “The Hebrew אב, ‘father,’ also signifies ‘grandfather, ancestor.’ The mention of David implies that Hezekiah’s prayer was answered not for his own sake but for the merit of his great ancestor.” (P. 178)

<sup>28</sup>Oswalt states that the words *I have heard...I have seen* “speak of the living God Who is able to be touched by our weaknesses. Unlike the idols, who have eyes and ears but can neither see nor hear, God both knows and intervenes in the life of His people.” (P. 677) See:

**Isaiah 37:17,**

Incline, O YHWH, Your ear, and hear!  
Open, O YHWH, Your eye, and see!  
And hear all Sennacherib’s words  
which he sent forth to reproach a living God!

**Isaiah 43:8,**

Bring forth a blind people, and they have eyes;  
and deaf people, and they have ears.

Look at Me—adding to your days fifteen year(s)!<sup>29</sup>

38:6<sup>30</sup> וּמִכַּף מֶלֶךְ-אַשּׁוּר׃

אֶצִּילְךָ וְאֶת הָעִיר הַזֹּאת

וְגִנֹּתִי עַל-הָעִיר הַזֹּאת:

And from (the) palm / sole of Assyria's King,  
I will deliver you (singular) and this city;  
and I will defend over this city.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Where our Hebrew text has הִנְנִי יוֹסֵף עַל-יָמֶיךָ חֲמִשׁ עָשָׂר שָׁנָה: "Look at Me, adding upon your days fifteen years," the parallel passage, **2 Kings 20:5** has הִנְנִי רֹפֵא לְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי תַעֲלֶה בֵּית יְהוָה: "Look at Me, healing to / for you; on the third day you will go up (to) YHWH's house / temple!" Here, in **Isaiah 38**, compare **verse 22**.

Slotki states that Hezekiah's illness "occurred in the fourteenth year of his reign (**Isaiah 36:1**) which lasted twenty-nine years (**2 Kings 18:2**)." (P. 179)

Oswalt observes that "Depending on the date of accession, Hezekiah lived until 696 B.C.E. or 685 B.C.E., so this event occurred around 710 or 700 B.C.E." (P. 677)

Watts states that "Fifteen years, added to the fourteen-year reign that preceded the siege according to **2 Kings 18:13**, completes the twenty-nine years of his reign (**2 Kings 18:2**)." (P. 51) He admits that this creates chronological problems.

<sup>30</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 6**: "And out of the hand of the King of Assyria I will save thee and this city, and I will cover over (or protect) this city...The parallel passage (**2 Kings 20:6**) adds, for My Own sake and for the sake of David My servant, as in **Isaiah 37:35**." (P. 77)

<sup>31</sup>The "city" is of course, Jerusalem.

Motyer comments that "No conditions are attached [for the Divine answer to prayer]. These promises are stated as a fact incapable of forfeiture." (P. 291)

Oswalt states that 'Many commentators take this promise of deliverance from the King of Assyria as proof positive that this healing took place prior to Sennacherib's invasion. However, that conclusion does not necessarily follow. Just because Sennacherib had returned home in defeat did not mean that he would not be back the next year and the next and the next, making Hezekiah's added years ones of torment. But God promises that Hezekiah need not fear the Assyrians during his remaining life-

(continued...)

38:7<sup>32</sup> וְזֶה-לְךָ הָאוֹת מֵאֵת יְהוָה

אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה אֶת-הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר:

And this (will be) for you the sign from YHWH,  
that YHWH will do this word which He spoke:

38:8<sup>33</sup> הֲנִי מוֹשִׁיב אֶת-צֶל הַמַּעְלֹת

<sup>31</sup>(...continued)

span. Thus the verse as it stands does not solve the dating problem. In any case, Isaiah's prediction was correct. No King of Assyria ever captured Jerusalem." (P. 677)

<sup>32</sup>Oswalt comments on **verses 7-8** that "Although the record here does not include it, **2 Kings 20:8** reports that Hezekiah himself requested a confirmation sign (see **verse 22**)...This action is diametrically opposite to Ahaz's refusal to accept a sign when one was offered. Hezekiah wished to trust God. Ahaz did not." (P. 677)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 7**: "*And this (shall be) to thee the sign from Jehovah, that Jehovah will perform this word which He hath spoken. The parallel narrative in Kings is much more circumstantial. What occurs below, as the last two verses of this chapter, there stands in its regular chronological order, between the promise of recovery and the announcement of the sign, so that the latter appears to have been given in compliance with Hezekiah's own request and choice. 'And Isaiah said, This (shall be) to thee the sign from Jehovah, that Jehovah will perform the thing which He hath spoken; shall the shadow advance ten degrees, or shall it recede ten degrees? And Hezekiah said, It is a light thing for the shadow to decline ten degrees: nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees' (2 Kings 20:9, 10).*" (Pp. 77-78)

<sup>33</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 8**: "*Behold, I (am) causing the shadow to go back, the degree which it has gone down (or which have gone down) on the degrees of Ahaz with the sun, ten degrees backward; and the sun returned ten degrees on the degrees which it had gone down. As to the nature of the phenomenon here described there are three opinions. The first is, that the prophet took advantage of a transient obscuration, or of some unusual refraction, to confirm the King's belief of what he promised. The second is, that the whole is a myth of legend of a later date. The third is, that Isaiah did actually exhibit a supernatural attestation of the truth of his prediction...The choice is not between a greater and lesser miracle, but between a miracle, a myth, and a trick...*

"[Another] question, whether the *degrees* here mentioned were the graduated scale of a dial or the steps of a staircase...There is no word in the text necessarily denoting such an instrument [as a sun-dial]...The words **מַעְלֹת אַחַז בְּשֶׁמֶשׁ**...which [some] render '*the sun-dial of Ahaz*,' but which literally mean, *the degrees of Ahaz in (or by) the sun*...The [Aramaic] Targum has hour-stone...and the Latin Vulgate *horologium*

(continued...)

אֲשֶׁר יִרְדֶּה בְּמַעְלֹת אֶחָז בְּשִׁמְשׁ  
אַחֲרֵי עֶשֶׂר מַעְלֹת

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<sup>33</sup>(...continued)

[‘timepiece’]. The only word corresponding to all this in the original is **מַעְלֹת**, which, like the Latin *gradus*, first means steps, and then degrees. The nearest approach to the description of a dial is in the words *degrees of Ahaz*. This circumstance may show that the reference to a dial, properly so called, is not so obvious or necessary in the Hebrew text as in the **English Version**. It was...alleged by Scaliger and other early writers on the subject, that the use of [sun-]dials was unknown in the days of Hezekiah. Later investigations have destroyed the force of this objection, and made it probable that solar chronometers of some sort were in use among the Babylonians at a very early period, and that Ahaz may have borrowed the invention from them, as he borrowed other things from the Assyrians (**2 Kings 16:10**)...

“There is therefore no historical necessity for assuming...that the shadow here meant was the shadow cast upon the steps of the palace, called the stairs of Ahaz... The only question is, whether this is not the simplest and most obvious explanation of the words, and one which entirely exhausts their meaning. If so, we may easily suppose the shadow to have been visible from Hezekiah’s chamber, and the offered sign to have been suggested by the prophet by the sight of it.” (Pp. 78-79)

Oswalt comments that “There is no certainty as to exactly what the *steps* mentioned here involved. They may have been a part of a device consciously intended for measuring time, or they may have been an ordinary staircase on the exterior of the palace upon which the setting sun happened to cast a shadow. In the former case, the device was perhaps a stepped pyramid with a pillar on top of it. Thus, in the morning the shadow of the pillar would retreat up the western steps and in the afternoon it would descend the eastern ones.

“G. A. Smith paints a graphic picture of the dying King watching from his sickroom as the shadow inexorably descended the steps. How easily he could have associated his own ebbing strength with that lengthening shadow and contemplated the coming sunset with dread. Thus when the prophet offered to move the shadow forward ten steps, one can imagine the King reacting with alarm. Much better to move it backward, up the steps, as a sign of the Divine reprieve (**2 Kings 20:9-10**).” (P. 678)

Watts states that “A sign, to be effective, must usually contradict the ordinary or expected course of events. In this instance, the sun’s shadow moves backwards, i.e., from east to west instead of the usual west to east, as the sun advances in the opposite direction. This was measured on *the steps of Ahaz*, which were built by Hezekiah’s father and on which, by design or accident, on an ordinary day a shadow marked the movement of the sun down the steps. On this day, the shadow would move back up ten steps. This was to be Hezekiah’s sign.” (P. 52)

וַתָּשָׁב הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ עֶשְׂרֵי מַעְלֹת בְּמַעְלֹת אֲשֶׁר יָרְדָה:

Look at Me—turning back (the) shadow of the steps,<sup>34</sup>

which descended on (the) steps of Achaz<sup>35</sup> by the sun,  
backwards, ten steps!

And the sun returned ten steps on the steps which it went down.<sup>36</sup>

38:9<sup>37</sup> מִכְּתָב לְחִזְקִיָּהוּ מֶלֶךְ־יְהוּדָה

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<sup>34</sup>**1QIs<sup>a</sup>** has “the steps of the upper chamber of Ahaz.” The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has “steps of the house of Ahaz.”

<sup>35</sup>Motyer translates “the stairway of Ahaz (leading to his ‘upper room’?, **2 Kings 23:12**), either by chance or by design, recorded the moving shadow of the sun’s passage, and the confirmatory sign attached to the Lord’s promise was that the shadow would retreat ten steps...The barest requirement of the verse is that the shadow retreated (and did it then resume its former position?). But either way, a miracle of God was wrought in confirmation of His word to the King.” (P. 292)

<sup>36</sup>Translations of **verse 8** vary:

**King James**, “Behold, I will bring again the shadow of the degrees, which is gone down in the sun dial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward. So the sun returned ten degrees, by which degrees it was gone down.”

**Tanakh**, “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.” And the sun’s *shadow* receded ten steps, the same steps as it had descended.”

**New Revised Standard**, “See, I will make the shadow cast by the declining sun on the dial of Ahaz turn back ten steps.” So the sun turned back on the dial the ten steps by which it had declined.”

**New International**, “I will make the shadow cast by the sun go back the ten steps it has gone down on the stairway of Ahaz.” So the sunlight went back the ten steps it had gone down.”

**New Jerusalem**, “Look, I shall make the shadow cast by the declining sun on the steps -- the steps to Ahaz’s roof-room-go back ten steps.’ And the sun went back the ten steps by which it had declined.”

**Rahlfs**, τὴν σκιάν τῶν ἀναβαθμῶν οὓς κατέβη ὁ ἥλιος τοὺς δέκα ἀναβαθμοὺς τοῦ οἴκου τοῦ πατρός σου ἀποστρέψω τὸν ἥλιον τοὺς δέκα ἀναβαθμοὺς καὶ ἀνέβη ὁ ἥλιος τοὺς δέκα ἀναβαθμοὺς οὓς κατέβη ἡ σκιά, “The shadow of the flight of stairs, which the sun descended, the ten stairs our the house of your father—I will turn back the sun the ten stairs. And the sun ascended the ten stairs which the shadow descended.”

<sup>37</sup>Slotki describes **verses 9-20** as containing “A psalm by Hezekiah describing his suffering, fear and despair when he was almost face to face with death, and his relief,

(continued...)

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<sup>37</sup>(...continued)

joy and thanksgiving when his prayer for recovery was answered.” (P. 179)

Motyer states that “In [Hezekiah’s] psalm we find that Hezekiah was fully aware of the peril he had been in: to die under Divine wrath (**verse 13**), without hope (**verse 17b**) and with sin at that time unforgiven (**verse 17c**). He also knew how he had been rescued: by prayer (**verse 14**), the Divine response (**verse 15a,b**) and the disposition of the Lord to save (**verse 20**).” (P. 292)

Oswalt comments that “This psalm poses some serious questions to contemporary students of psalmody, for it does not fit any of the commonly accepted forms...Why is it neither wholly lament nor wholly thanksgiving? What was the author attempting to convey?

“P. R. Ackroyd...suggests that the King’s misery, but eventual recovery, is intended to be seen as a type of the nation’s near death in exile, but eventual restoration. While this interpretation is very suggestive, it does not pay enough attention to the preponderance of lament material in the psalm. Why the heavy emphasis on mortality and loss?...

“In my view the stress is not so much upon the restoration as it is upon the fallibility of King and people that, despite the present reprieve, must issue in coming destruction. Thus there is thanksgiving for the deliverance from death (and from Assyrian destruction), but that rejoicing is very much muted by the grim realization of death’s reality (The large number of similarities with **Job** is instructive at this point. Compare **Job 38:17 [verse 10]; 4:21; 6:9 [verse 12]; 17:3 [verse 14]; 5:17, 18 [verse 17]**).

“There are perhaps two important theological points being made here. One of these is the reiteration of human helplessness and Divine trustworthiness. Even a King is helpless before the onslaught of death. Even the most powerful are laid low in its path. Why then would we put our trust in human mortality? On the other hand, God can and will snatch a person out of the very gates of death and restore him to life. He holds the keys of life and death and will use those to our benefit...

“The second point is...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 of whom Isaiah has spoken...Of that one a fuller revelation (**chapters 40-66**) still lies ahead.” (Pp. 681-82)

But we ask, Are **chapters 40-66** a “fuller revelation of the child of whom Isaiah has spoken”? We think not. What do you think?

(continued...)

בְּחֵלְתּוֹ

וַיְחִי מִחֲלָיו:

A writing<sup>38</sup> belonging to Hezekiah, King of Judah,

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<sup>37</sup>(...continued)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 9**: “A writing of Hezekiah, King of Judah, when he was sick, and lived (i.e. recovered) from his sickness. This is the title of an inscription of the following psalm (**verses 10-20**), not inserted by a copyist, or compiler, but prefixed, according to the ancient oriental usage, by the author himself, and therefore forming an integral part of the text...”

“That Hezekiah should compose a psalm, is not more strange than that he should make a collection of proverbs (**Proverbs 25:1**)...The inspiration and canonical authority of this production are clear from its having been incorporated by Isaiah in his prophecies, although omitted in the **Second Book of Kings**.” (Pp. 79-80)

Oswalt observes that the phrase, “A writing belonging to Hezekiah,” along with the rest of the verse, sounds very similar to the titles included for many of the **Psalms**.” (P. 682)

Oswalt adds that “A writing does not appear in the heading of any other psalm and so it has been proposed that מִכְתָּב, ‘writing,’ be amended to מִכְתָּם, a term used to identify **Psalms 56-60**.” (P. 682) We think the term means “An inscription.” See the next footnote.

<sup>38</sup>Where the Hebrew text has the noun מִכְתָּב, **mikhtabh**, “a writing,” the Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has προσευχή, “a prayer.”

Alexander comments that מִכְתָּב is given differing specific senses, by the Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) “prayer”; by the Aramaic Targum “confession,” and by Gesenius “song”—are all “inferred from the contents of the passage itself, and do not belong to the Hebrew word, which simply means a ‘writing.’” (Pp. 79-80)

during<sup>39</sup> his sickness,<sup>40</sup>  
and (when) he recovered from his sickness:<sup>41</sup>

38:10<sup>42</sup> אֲנִי אִמְרָתִי בְּדַמִּי יָמִי

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<sup>39</sup>Alexander states that “The ב at the beginning of the last clause **בַּחֲלוֹתוֹן**, **bachalotho**] does not mean *concerning his sickness*, indicating the subject of the composition, but as usual before an infinitive, denotes the time of the action. This is by most writers understood to be, *after he had been sick and had recovered...*The words, in themselves considered, would more naturally seem to mean, *during his sickness and recovery.*” (P. 80)

<sup>40</sup>Where our Hebrew text has **בַּחֲלוֹתוֹן**, “during his sickness,” **1QIs<sup>a</sup>** has **בחוליותיו** with what Watts calls “superfluous vowel letters” (p. 55).

<sup>41</sup>Alexander comments that “The idiomatic phrase **וַיְחִי מִחֲלוֹתוֹ**, ‘and he lived from his sickness’] in the sense of convalescence or recovery, occurs repeatedly elsewhere, either fully or in an abbreviated form.” (P. 80) See for example:

**2 Kings 1:2**, where Ahaziah sends messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub, whether he would recover from his injuries sustained in a fall.

**Genesis 20:7**, the Philistine King Abimelech is told to send for Abraham who will pray for him, enabling him to live / recover.

<sup>42</sup>Oswalt comments on **verses 10-14** that “The recurring theme in these verses is untimely death resulting in a sense of helplessness and gloom.” (P. 683)

Alexander translates **verse 10**: “*I said in the pause of my days I shall go into the gates of the grave, I am deprived of the rest of my years...*The explanation of **דַּמִּי יָמִי**, as meaning the blood of my days, is unnatural in itself, and requires an arbitrary change of pointing...Most interpreters regard **דַּמִּי יָמִי** as synonymous with **דְּמִי יָמִי**, ‘silence,’ stillness,’ though they differ as to the application of the figures...Schmidius supposes it to mean the standing still of the sun, or its apparent pause at noonday, and then noon itself, or what the Greeks call...the meridian of life. This may be the meaning of [the Greek (**Rahlfs**) version (ἐν τῷ ὕψει τῶν ἡμερῶν μου) ‘in the height (or zenith) of my days...Umbreit understands by the stillness of his days the period of life when the passions cease to govern and the character becomes more calm...[See] **Psalm 102:25**, ‘I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days (**בְּחַצֵּי יָמִי**) [literally ‘in the half of my days’]. There is not the slightest ground, however, for supposing this last to be the true text here.” (Pp. 80-81)

(continued...)

## אֵלֶכָה בְּשַׁעַרֵי שְׁאוֹל

פָּקַדְתִּי יֵתֶר שְׁנוֹתַי:

I, I said,<sup>43</sup> In (the) half of my days,<sup>44</sup>

I will go into (the) gates of (the) underworld;<sup>45</sup>

I was visited (in judgment for) the rest of my years.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>(...continued)

Oswalt comments that “At the time when he least expects it, Hezekiah is confronted by the gaping maw of death. Suddenly all the years upon which he had counted for more achievements vanish away like a vapor.” (P. 683)

<sup>43</sup>Slotki holds that “I said” means “I thought, I said to myself.” (P. 179)

<sup>44</sup>Slotki’s translation has “In the noontide of my days,” and he explains that the phrase is literally “‘stillness,’ noon being the time when the sun seems to stand still in the zenith. ‘Stillness’ may also imply rest, noon being observed as a time of rest for the laborer who worked since daybreak.” (P. 179)

The Hebrew phrase בְּדַמֵּי יָמַי, **bidhmiy yamay**, “in (the) half of my days,” is translated by the Greek (**Rahlfs**) as ἐν τῷ ὕψει τῶν ἡμερῶν μου, “in the height of my days.”

We think the phrase rather refers to Hezekiah’s being in the “midst,” or “halfway point” of his life, long before the normal time for his life to end.

<sup>45</sup>Slotki notes that “In **Job 17:16** *sheol* is described as having *bars*.”

Alexander states that “The preposition before *gates* [בְּ] may mean either *to*, *through*, or *into*; but the last is its usual sense after verbs of motion. As parallel expressions, may be mentioned *the gates of death* (**Psalms 9:14**), and *the gates of hell* (**Matthew 16:18** [πύλαι ᾗδου, *gates of hades / grave / underworld*—the same as **Isaiah 38:10**].” (P. 81)

Oswalt notes that “For the idea of the underworld as having gates, see the Akkadian poem ‘The Descent of Ishtar’ (Pritchard, **Ancient Near Eastern Texts**, pp. 107-08). The victim is required to pass through seven successive gates, being stripped of one more item at each until, having passed the seventh, she is completely naked.”

Compare also **Job 38:17**; **Psalms 9:14**<sup>Heb</sup> / **13**<sup>Eng</sup> and **108:19**<sup>Heb</sup> / **18**<sup>Eng</sup>.

<sup>46</sup>Slotki’s translation has “I am deprived of the residue of my years,” but he states that “more literally, [the translation should be] “I am punished (by forfeiting) the residue

(continued...)

38:11<sup>47</sup> אִמַּרְתִּי לֹא־אֶרְאֶה יְהוָה יְהוָה

בְּאֶרֶץ הַחַיִּים

לֹא־אֶבִּיט אָדָם עוֹד

עִם־יּוֹשְׁבֵי חַדְלָ:

I said, I will not see Yah Yah<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>(...continued)  
of my years.” (P. 179)

Alexander states that “The verb פָּקַד, **paqadh** means to visit, and especially to visit for the purpose either of inspection or punishment...expressing not mere loss or privation, but penal infliction. It was because Hezekiah regarded the threatened abbreviation of his life as a token of God’s wrath, that he so importunately deprecated [deplored] it.” (P. 81)

Translations of **verse 10** vary considerably:

**King James**, “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.”

**Tanakh**, “I had thought: I must depart in the middle of my days; I have been consigned to the gates of Sheol For the rest of my years.”

**New Revised Standard**, “I said: In the noontide of my days I must depart; I am consigned to the gates of Sheol for the rest of my years.”

**New International**, “I said, “In the prime of my life must I go through the gates of death and be robbed of the rest of my years?”

**New Jerusalem**, “I thought: In the noon of my life I am to depart. At the gates of Sheol I shall be held for the rest of my days.”

**Rahlfs**, ἐγὼ εἶπα ἐν τῷ ὕψει τῶν ἡμερῶν μου ἐν πύλαις ᾗδου καταλείψω τὰ ἔτη τὰ ἐπίλοιπα, “I said, In the height of my days, in gates of hades / underworld I shall leave behind the years, the remaining ones.”

<sup>47</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 11**: “I said, I shall not see Jah, Jah in the land of the living; I shall not behold man again (or longer) with the inhabitants of the world. יְהוָה יְהוָה is not an error of the text for יהוה...but an intensive repetition similar to those in **verses 17-19**.” (P. 81)

<sup>48</sup>Perhaps because it is inconceivable to translators that the biblical writer(s) could use such a “nick-name” for Yahweh, most translators refuse to translate the Hebrew text here—changing it to “the Lord, even the Lord,” or just “the Lord,” or “the

(continued...)

in (the) land of the living.  
I will not look on a human again,  
with those dwelling (in the) world.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>(...continued)

Lord Himself,” or “Yahweh.” **Rahlf**s has τὸ σωτήριον τοῦ θεοῦ, “the salvation / deliverance of the God.” **Tanakh** alone (of the versions we are consulting) sticks with the Hebrew, having “Yah, Yah” (as does Alexander—see footnote 47). **1QIs<sup>a</sup>** has יה only once. Watts notes that “Two manuscripts and the Syriac translation read יהוה [YHWH] once” (p. 55), and he follows them in his translation. We disagree, holding that the unusual reading should be followed, not changed.

<sup>49</sup>Here a Hebrew noun occurs that is found nowhere else in the **Hebrew Bible**: חֲדַל, **chedhel**. **Brown-Driver-Briggs** defines it as meaning “cessation,” while **Holladay** defines it as meaning “realm of dead.” The problem is that when a Hebrew word occurs only once in the **Hebrew Bible**, it is very difficult to determine its meaning, and lexicographers are left to conjecture. **Rahlf**s omits this entire line.

The Hebrew verb חָדַל means “to cease,” and occurs some 89 times in the **Hebrew Bible**, which makes it seem probable that חֲדַל means “cessation.” The Hebrew adjective חֲדַל means “forbearing,” or “lacking,” but occurs only three times in the **Hebrew Bible**.

Slotki notes that “The word *chadel*, meaning ‘cessation,’ is taken as synonymous with חֲדַל *chedel*, ‘world,’ or ‘duration,’ which several Hebrew Manuscripts read here.” (P. 180)

Alexander states that “חֲדַל, which strictly means cessation, is regarded by the older writers as a description of this transitory life or fleeting world.” He comments that “The last words of the verse bear the same relation to *I shall not see man*, that the words in the land of the living bear to *I shall not see Jah*. If the latter designates the place in which he was no more to see God, then the former would naturally seem to designate the place in which he was no more to see man...[There is an] obvious affinity between this expression and that in **Psalm 49:2**, ‘Hear this, all the nations; give ear, all the inhabitants of the world [כָּל-יְשִׁבֵי תְּהוֹמֹת].” (Pp. 81-82) The affinity is not in the similar sounding Hebrew words **chaledh** and **chadhel**, but rather in the fact that those that inhabit the world have the opportunity to hear the Divine message.

Motyer comments on **verse 11** that “Hezekiah does not say that he will see neither God nor mankind in Sheol...but that contact with God and mankind in the land

(continued...)

<sup>49</sup>(...continued)

of the living will be over...Beyond this life Hezekiah envisages himself (literally) ‘along with those who dwell in cessation,’ i.e. they are still alive but this life is over.” (P. 293)

<sup>50</sup>Motyer entitles **38:12-14** “Images of despair.”

He states that “Four similies constitute this section: the fragility of life (the *tent*); its decisive end (the *weaver*); Divine hostility (the *lion*); and the seeming feebleness of prayer (the *swift, thrush* and *dove*).” (P. 293)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 12**: “*My dwelling is plucked up and uncovered by me (or away from me) like a shepherd’s tent. I have rolled up, like the weaver, my life; from the thrum He will cut me off; from day to night Thou wilt finish me...*”

“The same thing is here represented by two figures. The first is that of a tent, the stakes of which are pulled up, and the covering removed, with a view to departure. The usual sense of דֹּרֵי (generation) seems inappropriate here...That of dwelling is founded on the Arabic analogy, and yields a good sense...

“The second figure is that of a web completed and removed by the weaver from the loom. The old interpretation of קִפְּרָתִי makes it mean *cut off*; the modern one *rolled up*; the allusion in either case being to a weaver’s mode of finishing his work.” (P. 82)

Motyer comments that “*House* is ‘encampment’ and *pulled down* is ‘moved on’... Death is the great invader compelling the vanquished to move their fragile home. Hezekiah pictures himself as the weaver who has finished his pattern, detached it from the loom and rolled it up...The individual weaves his own pattern on the loom of life but the limit of material allocated to him, the time for weaving, is decided by Another Who (literally) ‘cuts me off from the loom.’ Death is in the hands of the Lord.” (P. 293)

Oswalt states that these are two “graphic similies. The first is the shepherd’s tent. It may have remained in one spot for some time while the grass lasted. In so doing, it would have given the illusion of some permanence, just as life does. But one day the grass gives out, and in a matter of hours nothing remains but a bit of trampled earth.

“So also the weaver works on a piece of cloth on her loom day after day. Passers by become used to seeing that particular fabric on the structure. But one day the weaver decides the roll is big enough and with a few swift strokes cuts it loose and carries it away. Life is like that. Death removes in a moment what had seemed so permanent.” (Pp. 683-84)

וּנְגַלָּה מִנִּי  
כְּאֶהֱל רְעִי  
קִפְרֹתִי כְּאֶרֶג חַיִּי  
מִדְּלָה יִבְצָעֵנִי  
מִיּוֹם עַד-לְיֵלָה תִּשְׁלִימֵנִי:

My generation / dwelling<sup>51</sup> was pulled up;<sup>52</sup>  
and it will be carried away / removed<sup>53</sup> from me,

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<sup>51</sup>Slotki's translation has "my habitation," and Slotki states that while the Hebrew דֹר, **dor**, usually means "generation," it is also used to mean "habitation." (P. 180)

If Hezekiah meant "my generation," the statement concerning its being pulled up and taken away / into exile would not be true. Hezekiah's "generation" was not taken into exile or taken away from him. His death would mean his own being taken away, but not his generation's being removed from him.

Watts notes that "Most translators have insisted that in this one case the context requires the meaning of 'dwelling' and by a *tour de force* [skill or ingenuity] keep it." He, however, "prefers the usual meaning of the word even if it is awkward." (P. 55)

The Greek translation of **Rahfs** is quite different, making the opening phrase in **verse 12** a continuation of **verse 11**. Still, where the Hebrew has "my generation," **Rahfs** has τῆς συγγενείας μου, "the kinsmen of mine," with nothing corresponding to "dwelling-place."

<sup>52</sup>The Hebrew niph'al verb נִסַּע, **nissa**( is commonly used for pulling up tent-pegs, and moving forward on a journey. A habitation such as a tent can be "pulled up"; and this seems more likely to be the meaning here. Whereas Hezekiah has been living in a King's palace, his habitation, not his generation, has been pulled up, and moved to the gates of *sheol* / the grave / underworld.

<sup>53</sup>The niph'al verb וּנְגַלָּה, **wenighlah**, if understood as waw-conversive / consecutive means "and it will be removed / carried away."

like a tent of my shepherd.<sup>54</sup>

I rolled up my life like a weaver,<sup>55</sup>  
from a (weaver's) loom He cuts / will cut me off.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>The Hebrew **כְּאֹהֶל רֹעִי** is “like a tent of my shepherd.” Watts notes that Symmachus, the Syriac and Latin Vulgate translations, and the Aramaic Targum have the plural, “shepherds.”

<sup>55</sup>This line, **קִפְּדִיתִי כְּאַרְגָּן תַּיִן**, which we translate by “I rolled up my life like a weaver,” is uncertain. The piel perfect verb **קִפְּדִיתִי**, **qippadhtiy** is the only occurrence of the verb in the **Hebrew Bible**.

Watts states that it “apparently means something like ‘roll up.’” (P. 56) Here, in the qal / perfect, it would be “I rolled up.” **1QIs<sup>a</sup>** has **סִפַּרְתִּי**, “I counted.”

**Rahifs** apparently translates the line by τὸ πνεῦμά μου παρ’ ἐμοὶ ἐγένετο ὡς ἰστός ἐρίθου ἐγγιζούσης ἐκτεμεῖν, “the spirit of mine with me became like a beam [of a loom] of a worker in wool drawing near to cutting [it] off.”

<sup>56</sup>Or, possibly:

like a tent of my shepherd, I rolled up my life;  
like a weaver, from a (weaver's) loom He cuts / will cut me off.

Slotki comments that “God will sever him from the world as a weaver cuts off the ends of the threads which connect the fabric with the loom.” (P. 180) The verse contains a double metaphor, that of a habitation / tent being pulled up and moved away, and that of a piece of fabric being cut off from the loom.

Here, with the phrase **יִבְצֵעֵנִי**, “He will cut / cuts me off,” Yah Yah is spoken of in the third person; later in the verse, the second person is used: **תִּשְׁלֵמֵנִי**, “You will complete me / finish me off.” See footnote 58.

Alexander states that “According to the latest writers [in the mid-nineteenth century], **מִדְּלָה**, **middallah** does not mean *with pining sickness* [as **King James** has it], nor *from a state of exaltation*, but from the thrum [or ‘loom’]...that is, the ends of the threads by which the web is fastened to the beam [in weaving].” (P. 82) We think Alexander’s statement still holds true today.

From day until night,<sup>57</sup>  
You will complete me / finish me off!<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Slotki comments on the phrase “from day even to night,” that “Hezekiah, turning in gratitude to God for his merciful deliverance, recalls that his end seemed so near, as if life were to be extinguished *from day even to night*, i.e. in the briefest span of time.” (P. 180) But there are shorter spans of time, for example from second to second, or from one minute to the next.

Alexander observes that “*From day to night* is commonly explained to mean *before tomorrow*, within the space of one day.” (P. 83)

Motyer states that the phrase is “an idiom of imminent action implying ‘Before the day is out.’” (P. 293)

Oswalt holds that there are two possible interpretations. “On the one hand it may mean both day and night, i.e., continually, or it may mean between morning and evening, i.e., suddenly... The latter seems more likely.” (P. 684)

Watts notes that “As in **verse 12**, literally, ‘from day to night you finish me’ could mean ‘all day from morning to night’ or ‘in one day from morning to night.’” He chooses the latter. (P. 56)

<sup>58</sup>Here and in the next verse, where this sixth line of **verse 13** is repeated verbatim, the hiphil of the root **שָׁלַם** means, we think, not “to make complete,” but “to finish off.” The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has παραδόθην, “I was handed over,” “I was betrayed.”

Alexander comments that “The verb in the last clause [תַּשְׁלִימֵנִי, **tashliymenyi**] might...be explained to mean *Thou wilt (or do Thou) make me whole*. But interpreters appear to be agreed in giving it the opposite sense of *Thou wilt make an end of me*. Some suppose, moreover, that the figure of a weaver and his web is still continued, and that the idea expressed in the last clause is that of finishing a piece of work.” (P. 83)

Motyer observes that the verb is imperfect, “meaning either ‘You make,’ or ‘You will make’—the moment of death, ever imminent, is God’s decision.” (P. 293)

Translations of **verse 12** vary considerably:

**King James**, “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.”

**Tanakh**, “My dwelling is pulled up and removed from me Like a tent of shepherds; My life is rolled up like a web And cut from the thrum. Only from daybreak to nightfall

(continued...)

<sup>58</sup>(...continued)

Was I kept whole...”

**New Revised Standard**, “My dwelling is plucked up and removed from me like a shepherd's tent; like a weaver I have rolled up my life; he cuts me off from the loom; from day to night you bring me to an end...”

**New International**, “Like a shepherd's tent my house has been pulled down and taken from me. Like a weaver I have rolled up my life, and he has cut me off from the loom; day and night you made an end of me.”

**New Jerusalem**, “My home has been pulled up, and thrown away like a shepherd's tent; like a weaver, I have rolled up my life, he has cut me from the loom. From dawn to dark, you have been making an end of me...”

**Rahlf's**, ἐκ τῆς συγγενείας μου κατέλιπον τὸ λοιπὸν τῆς ζωῆς μου ἐξῆλθεν καὶ ἀπῆλθεν ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ ὡσπερ ὁ καταλύων σκηνην πήξας τὸ πνεῦμά μου παρ’ ἐμοὶ ἐγένετο ὡς ἰστός ἐρίθου ἐγγιζούσης ἐκτεμεῖν ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ παρεδόθη, “[No longer shall I see a man] from my kindred. I have left behind the rest of my life; it has gone out and departed from me like the one who having pitched a tent takes it down; my spirit in me became like the web of a weaver who approaches to cut it off. <sup>13</sup> In that day I was given over... (**NETS**; we have great difficulty reading this Greek verse.)

<sup>59</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 13**: “*I set (Him before me) till the morning* (i.e. all night) *as a lion* (saying), *so will He break all my bones; from day to night Thou wilt make an end of me*. Either these last words are repeated in a different sense, or else the repetition shows that they have no special reference, in the foregoing verse, to the process of weaving...Jarchi adheres to the Masoretic accents, and explains the first clause, *I likened myself to* (or *made myself like*) *a lion* (i.e. roared) *until the morning*...

[Alexander suggests] “explaining שְׁוִיִּיתִי, **shiwwiythiy** in accordance with its usage in **Psalms 16:8**, and **119:30**. In the former case, the psalmist says, *I have set Jehovah before me always*, i.e. I continually recognize His presence, or regard Him as present. In the other case, the same idea seems to be expressed by the verb alone, with an ellipsis [omission of a word to be understood] of the qualifying phrase. *Thy judgments have I placed* (i.e. before me). Supposing a similar ellipsis here, the sense will be, *I set Him before me*, i.e. viewed Him as present, imagined or conceived of Him *as a lion*, and expected Him to act as such, saying, *so* (i.e. as a lion) *He will crush all my bones*.” (P. 83)

Watts translates שְׁוִיִּיתִי, **shiwwiythiy** by “I shall be smooth / quiet,” and refers to **Psalms 131:1-3**:

1 O YHWH, my heart was not exalted;  
and my eyes were not raised (haughtily);

(continued...)

כְּאֲרֵי כֵן יִשְׁבֵּר כָּל-עֲצָמוֹתַי  
 מִיּוֹם עַד-לַיְלָה תִּשְׁלִימָנִי:

<sup>59</sup>(...continued)

and I did not walk with great things,  
 and with things more wondrous than me.

2 אִם-לֹא שְׁוִיתִי  
 וְרוֹמַמְתִּי נַפְשִׁי  
 כַּנְּמַל עָלַי אִמּוֹ  
 כַּנְּמַל עָלַי נַפְשִׁי:

If I did not smooth / calm  
 and silence my innermost-being--  
 like a weaned child with his mother,  
 like the weaned child with my innermost-being.

3 Wait, O Israel, to / for YHWH,  
 from now and until long-lasting-time!

1QIs<sup>a</sup>, instead of שְׁוִיתִי, reads שְׁפֹתִי, perhaps “I swept bare”—but we are uncertain as to its meaning.

Watts notes that “Houbigant was the first to emend the Hebrew to read שִׁוַּעֲתִי, ‘I cry [cried] out,’ following the Aramaic Targum.” (P. 56)

Motyer states that “Hezekiah sees himself as a sick man who has come through another day and settled himself for the night but there is no cessation of Divine hostility. God is as hostile as a *lion*, strong enough to smash the very *bones*...[Hezekiah] lived with the ceaseless expectation of death and with a sense of incessant Divine hostility, death under the wrath of God.” (P. 293)

Oswalt states that “The uncertainty as to the correct reading of the opening word of the verse...makes it difficult to give a final interpretation of the meaning of the verse...

“The Aramaic Targum’s reading, ‘I roared like a lion,’ is...appropriate to the setting, but it is the Lord Who is compared to a lion, not the King. On balance the reading ‘I cried out (for help)’ seems most appropriate. So the writer says he groaned for help through the night, but in the morning ‘the lion’ was still cracking his bones between his powerful jaws...By nightfall there seemed no hope at all. The shadow had descended the steps and life had seemed to ebb away on each lower step.” (Pp. 684-85)

I was calm until morning,<sup>60</sup>

like the lion,<sup>61</sup> so He shatters all my bones.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>For this usage of the verb שָׁוִיתִי, compare **Psalm 131:2**,

131:2 אִם-לֹא שָׁוִיתִי וְדוּמְמָתִי נִפְשִׁי  
כְּגִמְלָה עָלַי אִמּוֹ  
כְּגִמְלָה עָלַי נִפְשִׁי:

If I did not smooth / calm and silence my innermost-being--  
like a weaned child with his mother,  
like the weaned child with my innermost-being...

Motyer suggests the translation “I composed myself.” (P. 293)

<sup>61</sup>Slotki’s translation has “The more I make myself like unto a lion until morning,” and Slotki holds that this means Hezekiah considers himself “strong to endure the agony of his pains.” (P. 180)

<sup>62</sup>Slotki holds that the subject of this line is not YHWH, but rather “The subject is his [Hezekiah’s] illness.” (P. 180)

For the idea of YHWH attacking an individual like a lion, compare:

**Job 10:16,**

And He rose up like the lion—You hunt (for) me;  
and You returned; You did wonders against me.

**Lamentations 3:10,**

He (is) a bear lying in wait for me,  
a lion in hiding-places.

**Hosea 5:14,** where YHWH is depicted as saying:

Because I (am) like the lion to Ephraim,  
and like the young lion to Judah’s household.  
I, I will tear, and I will go;  
I will lift (them) up, and there is no one delivering!

**Hosea 13:7-8,**

7 And I was to them like a lion,  
like a leopard upon (the) way I will watch / lie in wait!

(continued...)

From day until night You finish me off!<sup>63</sup>

38:14<sup>64</sup> כְּסוֹס עֲגוּר כִּן אֲצַפְפִּיךָ

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<sup>62</sup>(...continued)

- 8 I will encounter them like a bear robbed (of her cubs);  
and I tore / will tear their heart's encasement;  
and I devoured / will devour them there, like a lion;  
a wild animal of the field will rip them open!

**Amos 3:8,**

A lion roared--  
who will not be afraid?  
My Lord YHWH spoke--  
who will not speak for Him?

<sup>63</sup>Compare footnote 21.

Translations of **verse 13** vary:

**King James**, "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."

**Tanakh**, "Then it was as though a lion Were breaking all my bones; I cried out until morning. (Only from daybreak to nightfall Was I kept whole.)

**New Revised Standard**, "I cry for help until morning; like a lion he breaks all my bones; from day to night you bring me to an end.

**New International**, "I waited patiently till dawn, but like a lion he broke all my bones; day and night you made an end of me."

**New Jerusalem**, "till daybreak, I cried for help; like a lion, he has crushed all my bones, from dawn to dark, you have been making an end of me."

**Rahlf's**, (<sup>12</sup> παρεδόθη) ἕως πρωὶ ὡς λέοντι οὕτως τὰ ὀστέα μου συνέτριψεν ἀπὸ γὰρ τῆς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς νυκτὸς παρεδόθη, "I was handed over / betrayed until

morning like a lion; in this way He broke my bones; for from the day until the night I was handed over / betrayed."

<sup>64</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 14**: "*Like a swallow (or) a crane (or like a twittering swallow), so I chirp; I moan like the dove; my eyes are weak (with looking) upward (or on high); O Jehovah, I am oppressed, undertake for me (or be my surety)...*

"In the first clause the moanings of the sufferer are compared, as in many other cases, to the voice of certain animals. The dove is often spoken of in such connections, and the mention of it here makes it probable that the parallel expressions are also descriptive of a bird or birds.

(continued...)

אֶהְגֶּה כִּי־וֹנָה  
 בְּלִו עֵינַי לַמָּרוֹם  
 אֲדַנִּי עֲשָׂקָה-לִּי  
 עֲרַבְנִי:

Like a swallow, a crane, so I chirp,<sup>65</sup>

I groan like the dove.

My eyes languish for the height.<sup>66</sup>

My Lord, oppression / distress belongs to me!

<sup>64</sup>(...continued)

Motyer's translation is "*I cried*," and he comments that this is "I keep chattering on." In the crisis he kept a ceaseless stream of intercession but it seemed as feeble and unavailing as birdsong, not least because the strain of prayer was an additional burden making the sick man grow *weak*." (Pp. 293-94)

Oswalt states that "This verse continues to express the King's sense of helplessness: his cries are like the chirping of a bird, or the moaning coo of a dove. He has looked up to God in seemingly futile petition for so long that his eyes grow weak. Nevertheless, he will not give up his plea; he knows that although God may be the One crushing his bones, so also God is the only One Who cares enough to deliver him.

"This is an important theological truth. Hezekiah looks to his 'Oppressor' for deliverance. This is the only direction which a true montheism can take. The alternative is a dualism which pits 'bad' Gods against 'good' Ones. But in the biblical faith, nothing is beyond God's control. Without going to the lengths of Islam, which sees Allah as the immediate cause of every event, it is still possible to affirm that all which occurs is subject to God's veto." (P. 685)

Oswalt adds that the Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) "lacks **verse 15** altogether, while the Aramaic Targum heavily alters the two verses in its paraphrase." (P. 685)

<sup>65</sup>Slotki comments that this line and the next are "a description of the invalid's moaning and sighing." (P. 180)

Alexander states that "the comparison before us is evidently meant to be descriptive of inarticulate moans or murmurs." (P. 84)

<sup>66</sup>Slotki's translation has "Mine eyes fail with looking upward," and he comments that the words are literally "...with looking 'to the height,' the abode of God." (P. 180)

Take me on pledge!<sup>67</sup>

38:15<sup>68</sup> מִה־אֲדַבֵּר

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<sup>67</sup>Slotki states concerning this last line that “Death or illness is personified as a creditor demanding retribution for the invalid’s sins, and God in His mercy and power to forgive is asked, so to speak, to act as surety.” (P. 180)

The imperative verb in the phrase here, **עָרַבְנִי**, (**orbheniy**, means “take on pledge,” or “give in pledge, exchange,” or in this case, “go surety for the safety or debts of the one crying out.” We imagine Hezekiah as crying out to YHWH, Take my side, rescue me; pay my debt which I myself cannot pay! Motyer thinks it means “come to my aid.” (P. 294)

Translations of **verse14** vary:

**King James**, “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.”

**Tanakh**, “I piped like a swift or a swallow, I moaned like a dove, As my eyes, all worn, looked to heaven: ‘My Lord, I am in straits; Be my surety!’”

**New Revised Standard**, “Like a swallow or a crane I clamor, I moan like a dove. My eyes are weary with looking upward. O Lord, I am oppressed; be my security!”

**New International**, “I cried like a swift or thrush, I moaned like a mourning dove. My eyes grew weak as I looked to the heavens. I am being threatened; Lord, come to my aid!”

**New Jerusalem**, “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.”

**Rahfs**, ὡς χελιδῶν οὕτως φωνήσω καὶ ὡς περιστέρα οὕτως μελετήσω ἐξέλιπον γάρ μου οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ τοῦ βλέπειν εἰς τὸ ὕψος τοῦ οὐρανοῦ πρὸς τὸν κύριον ὃς ἐξείλατό με, “Like a swallow, in this way I will call / cry out; and like a dove, in this way I will take pains / care; for my eyes ceased seeing / looking into the height of the heaven, towards the Lord, Who rescued me.”

Alexander comments that the translation “undertake for me” means “interpose between me and my enemies. The reference is rather to protection than to justification.” (P. 84)

<sup>68</sup>Oswalt comments that “It is tempting to say that **verses 15-20** change the tone of the psalm from lament to praise. This may be the case, but the interpretation (and in some cases the reading) of **verses 15** and **16** is so uncertain that it is not possible to make such an assertion with confidence. By **verse 17b** the change has definitely occurred, however, and the psalm closes with the promises of continuous praise, a behavior which is not to be found in sheol.” (P. 685)

(continued...)

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<sup>68</sup>(...continued)

Motyer entitles **verses 15-17** “Divine restoration.”

He comments that “Abruptly the poem swings from prayer to answer. Mere birdsong it may seem (**verse 14**) in the face of the power of death and the hostile God, but it prevails!...Following this, Hezekiah affirms that past experience will govern his future life: I will walk humbly (root verb **לָלַךְ**). In **Psalm 42:5<sup>Heb</sup> / 4<sup>Eng</sup>** the word is used of walking in religious procession, hence ‘to walk thoughtfully or carefully, to watch one’s step.’” (P. 294)

These things I will remember,  
and I will pour out upon myself my innermost-being--  
when I would pass over with the multitude.

I would walk / lead them slowly [**לְלַכְתִּי**] to God’s house / temple,

with a voice of ringing shout(s) and thanksgiving(s),  
a crowd keeping pilgrimage-festival.

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 15**: “*What shall I say! He hath both spoken to me and Himself hath done (it); I shall go safely all my years for the bitterness of my soul.* This, which is substantially the common version, is the one adopted by most modern writers, who regard the verse as an expression of surprise and joy at the deliverance experienced. *What shall I say!* i.e. how shall I express my gratitude and wonder! *He hath said and done it*, He has promised and performed, perhaps with an implication that the promise was no sooner given than fulfilled. The recollection of this signal mercy he is resolved to cherish *all his years*, i.e. throughout the rest of his life, by *going softly, solemnly, or slowly, on account of the bitterness of his soul*, i.e. in recollection of his sufferings. Some, however, understand these last words to mean *in the bitterness of my soul*, i.e. in perpetual contrition and humility...

“But the preposition **עַל** is properly expressive, not of the manner of his going, but of its occasion. The verb **לָלַךְ**, **jeddaddeh** occurs only here and in **Psalm 43:5**, where it is commonly agreed to signify the solemn march of the people in procession to mount Zion. It would here seem to be equivalent to the phrase...applied to Ahab in **1 Kings 21:27**...

“Another interpretation of the verse, which might, at first sight, seem more natural, regards it as the language of Hezekiah during his sickness, and as expressive, not of joy and wonder, but of submission. *What shall I say*, in the way of complaint? *He hath both said and done it*, i.e. threatened and performed it. But this view of the first clause cannot be reconciled with any natural interpretation of the second, where the phrase *all my years* is [in-]consistent with the supposition that he expected to die

(continued...)

וְאָמַר-לִי  
וְהוּא עָשָׂה  
אֲדַדְּהָ כָּל-שָׁנֹתַי  
עַל-מַר נַפְשִׁי:

What shall I say?<sup>69</sup>

And He spoke to me,<sup>70</sup>

and He acted.<sup>71</sup>

I will walk slowly<sup>72</sup> all my years,<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>(...continued)  
forthwith.” (Pp. 84-85)

<sup>69</sup>Slotki comments that “Hezekiah is unable to express his feelings of gratitude adequately.” (P. 180)

<sup>70</sup>Slotki states that this means “God promised recovery in the message sent by Isaiah.” (P. 180)

Oswalt’s translation is “He has said it,” and he states that if it is correct, it “speaks of the Divine creative word. God has but to speak the word and the matter is done...Hezekiah knows that this matter is in God’s hand and not in his own.” (Pp. 685-86)

<sup>71</sup>Slotki states that this means “He [YHWH] fulfilled His promise.” (P. 181)

Oswalt comments that the phrase “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 **Psalm 116:12**, ‘How shall I return to the YHWH, all His benefits to me?’). On the other hand, it is possible that this is an utterance of resignation: ‘This affliction is from God and my words are useless’ (see **Psalm 39:10-11**<sup>Heb</sup> / **9-10**<sup>Eng</sup>, ‘I became mute; I will not open my mouth--because You, You acted / did (it)! Take away Your stroke from upon me! By the hostility of Your hand I was finished!’” (P. 686)

<sup>72</sup>Oswalt comments that the phrase *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...negative...then the statement must mean that for whatever time is left him, the victim will bow his head under the judgment which has befallen him

(continued...)

because of my innermost-being's bitterness.<sup>74</sup>

38:16<sup>75</sup> אֲדַנִּי עַל־יָהֶם יַחִיָּן

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<sup>72</sup>(...continued)

...The final remark of the verse upon 'bitterness of soul' seems to point in the direction of resignation under the Divine hand of judgment." (P. 686)

<sup>73</sup>Slotki states that this means Hezekiah resolves to go about "in meekness and humility before God." (P. 181)

<sup>74</sup>Slotki states that this is referring to the bitterness "which he had experienced during his illness." (P. 181)

Translations of the last two lines of **verse 15** vary:

**King James**, "I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul." **New Jerusalem**, same;

**Tanakh**, "All my sleep had fled Because of the bitterness of my soul." **New Revised Standard**, similar;

**New International**, "I will walk humbly all my years because of this anguish of my soul." **Rahifs**, has nothing with regards to these two lines.

<sup>75</sup>Alexander translates **verse 16**: "*Lord, upon them they live, and as to everything in them is the life of my spirit, and Thou wilt recover me and make me live.* This exceedingly obscure verse is now most generally understood to mean, that life in general, and the life of Hezekiah in particular, was dependent on the power and promise of God. Upon them, the promise and performance implied in the verbs said and did of the preceding verse, they live, i.e. men indefinitely live." (P. 85)

Motyer states that "Difficulties attend the precise understanding of this verse [the two phrases *by such things* (literally 'by them') and *in them*] but its thrust is clear—'By reference to such things people should live,' i.e. others should take note of Hezekiah's experience and many such similar things and order their lives accordingly. He will set the example himself: 'and in regard to all they contain is the life of my spirit.'" (P. 294)

Oswalt is not as confident as Motyer. He states that "The questions surrounding this verse are even more complex than those relating to the previous one. Both the [Greek translation (**Rahifs**)] and the Aramaic Targum differ markedly from the Masoretic Text and from each other (Greek: 'O Lord, yes, it was told you concerning it and you roused up my breath and I was comforted and came to life.' Targum: 'My Lord, with regard to the dead You have declared that You would bring them back to life; but before them all You have caused my spirit to live and have preserved me alive and established me')." (P. 686)

וְלִכְל־בְּהֶן תִּי רוּחִי

וְתַחֲלִימֵנִי

וְהַחֲיֵנִי:

O my Lord, because of these things<sup>76</sup> they will live / recover,<sup>77</sup>  
and for everyone among them, my spirit<sup>78</sup> is alive / recovered.  
And You healed me,<sup>79</sup>  
and caused me to live / recover!<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>Slotki states that the phrase “by these things” refers to the things “spoken of in the preceding verse: the Divine promise and fulfilment.” (P. 181)

<sup>77</sup>Oswalt says that this line “is enigmatic. Perhaps ‘them’ refers to the words and acts of God (so Young). But Cheyne relates it to life’s experiences, depending on the final clause of the previous verse. In any case, Hezekiah knows that it is God who is ‘Lord’ of all that befalls him and that his life is in God’s hands.” (P. 686)

<sup>78</sup>Motyer states that “*spirit* is the energetic direction and conduct of life. So that there will be no doubt what *such things* and *them* refer to, Hezekiah triumphantly repeats the heart of the matter: *You restored me to health and let me live.*” (P. 294)

<sup>79</sup>Oswalt translates this phrase by *You gave me health*. He states that it “may be understood either as a plea or as an affirmation...The following imperative, *make me live*, is perhaps an expression of confidence...So the writer declares again that if he is to survive it must be God’s doing.” (Pp. 686-87)

<sup>80</sup>Translations of **verse 16** vary:

**King James**, “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.”

**Tanakh**, “My Lord, for all that and despite it My life-breath is revived; You have restored me to health and revived me.”

**New Revised Standard**, “O Lord, by these things people live, and in all these is the life of my spirit. Oh, restore me to health and make me live!”

**New International**, “Lord, by such things people live; and my spirit finds life in them too. You restored me to health and let me live.”

**New Jerusalem**, “The Lord is over them; they live, and everything in them lives by his spirit. You will cure me. Restore me to life.”

**Rahlf's**, κύριε περὶ αὐτῆς γὰρ ἀνηγγέλη σοι καὶ ἐξήγειράς μου τὴν πνοήν καὶ παρακληθεὶς ἔζησα, “O Lord, concerning it: for it was announced to You, and You raised up my breath; and comforted, I lived / recovered.”

38:17<sup>81</sup> הִנֵּה לְשָׁלוֹם

מֵרֶ-לִי מָר

וְאַתָּה חֲשַׁקְתָּ נַפְשִׁי

מִשַּׁחַת בְּלִי

כִּי הִשְׁלַכְתָּ אַחֲרַי גִּזְרֵי כָל-חַטָּאִי:

Look-for peace / welfare,

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<sup>81</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 17**: *Behold to peace (is turned) my bitter bitterness, and Thou hast loved my soul from the pit of destruction, because Thou hast cast behind Thy back all my sins.*” (P. 85)

Motyer comments that “All the anguish was worth it: it was for my benefit [*shalom*, ‘wellbeing,’ ‘wholeness,’ ‘fulfilment’]. In particular, it brought to Hezekiah an experience of Divine love, of rescue from the pit, and of forgiveness of sins...

“The Hebrew says ‘You loved my soul from the pit,’ which is a pregnant construction binding together the fact of deliverance and the motive of love.” (P. 294)

Oswalt states that in **verse 17** “The ambiguity of interpretation continues through the first clause here (lacking in the Greek / **Rahlfs**). Has Hezekiah found bitterness instead of well-being? Or is he saying that bitterness was for the sake of well-being? The commentators and translations are in general agreement that the latter is the case ...If this...is correct it lends some support to the positive understanding of the final clause of **verse 15**. The bitterness has been turned to good purpose and Hezekiah will not forget it...

“As Calvin remarked...forgiveness of sins and recovery from illness are two sides of God’s saving power. Hezekiah apparently felt that had he died this untimely death it would have been in punishment for sin, perhaps the sin of pride. Now the fact that he is recovering is evidence that God has turned away from Hezekiah’s sins and turned to Hezekiah...The confidence that our sins are buried in the sea of God’s grace is frequently the key to healing.” (P. 687) See **Psalms 103:3-4**: YHWH is:

- 3 The One Who forgives all your guilts / iniquities,  
the One Who heals all your diseases!
- 4 The One Who redeems your life from (the) pit (of destruction)!  
The One Who crowns you [with] steadfast love and (womb-like)  
compassions!

bitterness belonged to me--bitterness!<sup>82</sup>  
And You, You loved<sup>83</sup> my innermost-being--  
from a (the) pit's wearing out / corruption,<sup>84</sup>  
because You threw behind Your back all my sins!<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>Slotki explains that Hezekiah “had bitterness instead of the peace he had expected.” (P. 181)

<sup>83</sup>The verb here, **חָשַׁקְתָּ**, **chashaqta**, is defined by **Brown-Driver-Briggs** as “be attached to, love.” It is used in the **Hebrew Bible** for a man’s love for a woman—see **Genesis 34:8** and **Deuteronomy 21:11**; it is also used for YHWH’s love for Israel—see **Deuteronomy 7:7** and **10:15**. Here, in **Isaiah 37:17**, Hezekiah states that YHWH has loved his innermost-being / life, delivering it from destruction / corruption.

<sup>84</sup>The first four lines of **verse 17** are given varying translations:

**King James**, “Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul *delivered it* from the pit of corruption...”

**Tanakh**, “Truly, it was for my own good That I had such great bitterness: You saved my life From the pit of destruction...”

**New Revised Standard**, “Surely it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness; but you have held back my life from the pit of destruction...”

**New International**, “Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction...”

**New Jerusalem**, “At once, my bitterness turns to well-being. For you have preserved my soul from the pit of nothingness...”

**Rahlfs**, εἴλου γάρ μου τὴν ψυχὴν ἵνα μὴ ἀπόληται, “For you chose my life / self so that it might not perish...”

Motyer states that “destruction (**בְּלִי** from **בלה**, ‘become old’ and hence ‘termination, weakness’) is death as the end of earthly life, the feebleness of the departed.” (P. 294)

<sup>85</sup>This fifth line of **verse 17** is given very similar translations. It is Hezekiah’s claim that YHWH has completely forgiven him, “casting all his sins behind His back”! Those who claim there is no forgiveness in the **Hebrew Bible** need to reconsider that claim! As Slotki states, this is an affirmation of “complete forgiveness.” (P. 181)

Alexander comments that “The last clause shows that Hezekiah regarded the threatened destruction as a punishment for sin. To cast behind one, or behind one’s back, in Hebrew and Arabic, is to forget, lose sight of or exclude from view. The opposite idea is expressed by the figure of setting or keeping before one’s eyes.” (P. 86) See:

(continued...)

<sup>85</sup>(...continued)

**Psalm 90:7**<sup>Heb</sup> / **8**<sup>Eng</sup>,

You have set our iniquities before You,  
our secret sins in the light of Your presence.

**Psalm 109:14-15,**

- 14 May his fathers' iniquity be remembered to / by YHWH,  
and his mother's sin not be blotted out!  
15 May they be before YHWH constantly;  
and may He cut off their memory from (the) earth / land!

**Jeremiah 16:17,**

For My eyes are on all their ways.  
They are not hidden from Me,  
nor is their iniquity concealed from My eyes!

**Hosea 7:2,**

And they will not speak to their heart(s);  
all their evil I remembered!  
Now their deeds surrounded them;  
they were before My face!

Motyer states that '*Put / thrown...behind* etc. is a vivid picture of what is no longer the subject of attention or concern.' (P. 294)

<sup>86</sup>Slotki comments on **verses 18-19** that their thought should be compared to **Psalm 115:17-18.**" (P. 181)

- 17 The dead ones will not praise Yah,  
and neither all those going down (into) silence!  
18 And / but we, we will bless Yah,  
from now and until long-lasting-time.  
Praise (plural imperative) Yah!

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 18**: "*For the grave shall not confess Thee (nor) death praise Thee; they that go down to the pit shall not hope for Thy truth.* Here, as often in the **Psalms**, the loss of the opportunity of praising God is urged as a reason, not only why he should be loath to die, but why God should preserve him." (P.

(continued...)

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<sup>86</sup>(...continued)

86) See:

**Psalm 6:6<sup>Heb</sup> / 5<sup>Eng</sup>**, a psalm for David—a plea for salvation by one surrounded by evil foes / death-dealing enemies:

Because there is not in the death memory of You;  
in *sheol* / grave / underworld who will confess to You?  
(The affirmation is that in death YHWH is forgotten; and the implication of the second line's question is that no one in Sheol will confess to YHWH.)

**Psalm 88:11-12<sup>Heb</sup> / 10-11<sup>Eng</sup>**

11/10 Will You make / do a marvel for the dead?  
Or will dead spirits rise up, will they praise You? Selah  
12/11 Will Your steadfast-love be recounted in the grave?  
Your true-faithfulness in the place of destruction?

**Job 7:10**

As the cloud fades and vanishes,  
so he who goes down to Sheol does not come up;  
he returns no more to his house,  
nor does his place know him anymore.

**Ecclesiastes 3:19-20**

For what happens to the children of man  
and what happens to the beasts is the same;  
as one dies, so dies the other.  
They all have the same breath,  
and man has no advantage over the beasts,  
for all is a breath / vapor.  
All go to one place.  
All are from the dust, and to dust all return.

Alexander continues: "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. The true explanation of the [biblical statement] is given by Calvin, viz. That the language is that of extreme agitation and distress, in which the prospect of the future is absorbed in contemplation of the present, and also that so far as he does think of futurity, it is upon the supposition of God's wrath. Regarding death, in this case, as a proof of the Divine displeasure, he cannot but look upon it as the termination of his solemn praises." (P. 86)

Motyer likewise looks for an explanation that avoids the obvious meaning of

(continued...)

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<sup>86</sup>(...continued)

these passages: “Hezekiah must not be considered as making a comment on death in general but on his sort of death in particular: dying under Divine wrath, with sin unforgiven (**Psalms 6:6<sup>Heb</sup> / 5<sup>Eng</sup>; 30:9** [see the next footnote]; **88:11-12<sup>Heb</sup> / 10-11<sup>Eng</sup>** are often used to suggest that the **Old Testament** lacked any hope after death. In each case, however, the context is the same as in Hezekiah’s psalm: the prospect of death out of favor with God). In such circumstances the grave (*sheol*) offers no *praise / thanks; those who go down to the pit* with God as their Foe and with their sins unforgiven *cannot hope / do not wait in hope* for delivering *faithfulness* such as Hezekiah experienced.” (P. 295)

But do any of these passages say anything about “dying under Divine wrath”? We do not think so, and think that while there are passages that affirm hope beyond death, these passages hold the view that there is no hope beyond death. And we ask, why should we refuse to admit that different biblical authors held differing views on such subjects? We think Motyer (and others) are attempting to force the biblical authors to all hold the same views—which is obviously not the case!

What do you think?

We agree with Oswalt that “This is a classic statement of the **Old Testament** belief that the dead do not praise God.” But then he goes on to state that “There are at least three ways to understand this phenomenon, especially as it relates to the **New Testament** doctrine of resurrection:

- (1) It is speaking of those who die in sin;
- (2) It is only referring to the tomb and the corpses in the tomb;
- (3) It is a part of the process of progressive revelation whereby incomplete understandings were progressively replaced by better ones until the canon was complete...

“It is hard to show any place in the **Old Testament** where the righteous dead are spoken of differently than the unrighteous dead. There are no instances of the righteous dead praising God (It is true that there are instances where intimations of eternal bliss appear [e.g., **Psalm 23:6; Isaiah 26:19**; etc.], nor can Job’s longing for redemption in the hereafter be gainsaid [**Job 19:25-26**]. But these do not seem to represent developed, consciously held points of view)...Perhaps the solution is to say that the fuller truth declares that some of the dead will praise God, although not all.” (Pp. 687-88)

In our view, there are other and better ways to understand this phenomenon, including the obvious fact that different authors in the **Hebrew Bible** held differing views. And in fact, there are many more passages than those mentioned by Oswalt predicting hope beyond the grave. One, for example, is **Isaiah 25:6-8**, which depicts YHWH’s intention to swallow up death for all peoples and nations, wiping all their tears

(continued...)

מוֹת יְהַלְלֶךָ

לְאִישׁ־בְּרִי יוֹרְדֵי-בּוֹר אֶל-אֲמֹתֶיךָ:

Because *sheol* / the underworld / grave will not confess / give thanks to You,  
(or) death praise You.

Those going down (to the) pit will not hope for Your true-faithfulness!<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>(...continued)

away, and passages such as **Ezekiel 16:53-63**, predicting the restoration of the fortunes of Sodom, Samaria, and the worst whore-city of all, Jerusalem. **Psalms 16, 49** and **73** all point to a wondrous future beyond death.

Google “Universalism in the **Bible**” and witness the numerous books being published today by confessing Christians, both affirming universalism (with varying definitions of the word ‘universalism’) and denying it—reliving, we think, what is found in the **Hebrew Bible**, with its contrast between universal hope and denials of hope beyond the grave. Especially see the many passages from the **Book of Isaiah** that are referred to, including **Isaiah 25:6-8**.

Reading the **Hebrew Bible** enables the student to understand how both the Sadducees with their denial of the resurrection, and the Pharisees with their affirmation of resurrection of the body came to these divergent views. Both views are taught there!

<sup>87</sup>In his grief, Hezekiah affirms that there is no confession or praise or hope for God’s true-faithfulness (in the fulfilment of His promises) by those who have died and entered into *sheol*. Compare:

**Psalm 6:6**<sup>Heb</sup> / **5**<sup>Eng</sup> (see the preceding footnote);

**Psalm 30:10**<sup>Heb</sup> / **9**<sup>Eng</sup>, another psalm for David; the psalmist has been rescued from death by YHWH, and is thanking YHWH. In the midst of the psalm, he asks three questions:

What profit (is there) in my blood / death,  
in my going down to (the) pit (of *sheol*)?  
Will (the) dust confess You?  
Will it declare Your true-faithfulness?

(The implication of these questions is that there is no profit in the psalmist’s death, in his going down to the grave / underworld; dust—the condition of those in *sheol*—will not confess YHWH, nor declare His true-faithfulness.)

**Psalm 115:17-18**, see the preceding footnote.

38:19<sup>88</sup> תִּי תִי

הוּא יוֹדֵךְ

כְּמוֹנִי הַיּוֹם

אֵב לְבָנִים יוֹדִיעַ

אֶל-אַמְתֶּךָ:

One living, one living--

he shall confess / give thanks to You,  
like me, today.<sup>89</sup>

A father to children will make known  
Your true faithfulness,<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 19**: “*The living, the living, he shall thank Thee, like me (or as I do) today; father to sons shall make known with respect to Thy truth, i.e. the truth of Thy promises, as in the verse preceding. 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.*” (P. 86)

Motyer states that “Hezekiah defines the living as those who can do *as I am doing today*, offering praise to the Lord for His love which delivers and forgives [and] for His *faithfulness*...”

“The **Old Testament** prizes parental instruction (**Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Proverbs 4:1**) and here Hezekiah, who has already pledged personal devotion (**verses 15-16**), implicitly pledges domestic devotion.” (P. 295)

<sup>89</sup>Slotki’s translation has “As I do this day,” and Slotki states that “the verb is to be understood.” (P. 181)

<sup>90</sup>These last two lines in the Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) are:

καὶ γὰρ ἀπὸ γὰρ τῆς σήμερον παιδία ποιήσω  
ὃ ἀναγγελοῦσιν τὴν δικαιοσύνην σου  
for I also, from today will make / produce children  
who will announce Your righteousness.

Oswalt comments on **verse 19** that “Thus it is indeed the living who will praise

(continued...)

38:20<sup>91</sup> יְהוָה לְהוֹשִׁיעַנִי

וּבְגִנּוֹתַי נִגְנֵן

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<sup>90</sup>(...continued)

God and declare His faithfulness to their children. But the wonder of God’s plan is that living does not cease at the grave for His people. In fact, it enters a wonderful new dimension of life forevermore.” (Pp. 688-89)

But surely this last sentence is not a commentary on **Isaiah 38:19**, which says nothing about God’s plan that living does not cease at the grave; nor is there anything in the text about those who have entered the grave entering a wonderful new dimension of life forevermore. Oswalt is writing as a Christian believer in the resurrection of Jesus, and bringing in the **New Testament** teaching concerning the relevance of Jesus’ resurrection to believers in him. But this verse is limited to the affirmation that while the dead cannot praise God, the living can, throughout their lives, teaching their children concerning God’s faithfulness—with nothing said concerning eternal life.

<sup>91</sup>Alexander translates **verse 20**: “*Jehovah to save me! And my songs we will play, all the days of our life, at the house of Jehovah.*”

He comments that “The obvious ellipsis in the first clause may be variously filled with *came, hastened, commanded, was ready, be pleased*, or with the verb *is*, as an idiomatic periphrasis of the future, *is to save for will save.*” (P. 86)

Motyer comments on **verse 20**, “What a contrast between the temple (‘house’) of the Lord and the gates of Sheol (**verse 10**)! Salvation affords entrance to a life of praise in the presence of the Lord...

“[Hezekiah] traces his deliverance to the heart of the Lord, the gracious will lying behind the act.” (P. 295)

Oswalt simply states that “*The Lord to save me* is a grammatical impossibility in Hebrew as well as English.” But he goes on to say that “The infinitive is being used to express the imminent future (hence, *The Lord is at hand to save me*)...Thus the writer expresses his conviction that God has heard his cry and will deliver.” (P. 689)

But we wonder, if the wording is a grammatical impossibility, how is such an interpretation possible?

Oswalt adds that “These expressions of confidence in the midst of lament speak of an abiding conviction on the part of the Hebrew people concerning God’s nature: however inscrutable His ways [Oswalt is quoting Paul in **Romans 11:33**] and fearsome His judgments, beneath all that beats a Father’s heart which does hear the cries of His children and can be depended upon to deliver.” (P. 689)

כָּל-יְמֵי חַיֵּינוּ

עַל-בֵּית יְהוָה:

O YHWH, to save / to deliver me!<sup>92</sup>

And my music<sup>93</sup> we will play (with stringed instruments),  
all (the) days of our lives,<sup>94</sup>  
at YHWH's house / temple!<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup>Slotki's translation has "The Lord is ready to save me" and Slotki notes that the phrase "is ready" is "not in the text and to be implied." (P. 181)

We suggest that perhaps a phrase "hasten to" should be read into the text, which is obviously missing a verb. The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) solves this problem by attaching this phrase to the preceding verse.

<sup>93</sup>Alexander comments on the phrase וַיִּנְגְּנוּתַי, **uneghinothay**, "and my songs / music," that "נִינְהָ" is properly the music of stringed instruments, or a song intended to be so accompanied. The word may here be used in the more general sense of song or music; but there seems to be no need of excluding the original and proper meaning." (P. 86)

<sup>94</sup>Oswalt comments that this line "expresses the response of the heart which has truly encountered God's grace...Hezekiah knew for certain he was a dead man, but suddenly, unaccountably, he was alive, and so long as he lived he would never get over his gratitude to God." (Pp. 689-90)

<sup>95</sup>Translations of **verse 20** vary somewhat:

**King James**, "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."

**Tanakh**, "*It has pleased* the LORD to deliver us, That is why we offer up music All the days of our lives At the House of the LORD."

**New Revised Standard**, "The LORD will save me, and we will sing to stringed instruments all the days of our lives, at the house of the LORD." **New International**, closely similar;

**New Jerusalem**, "Yahweh, come to my help and we will make our harps resound all the days of our life in the Temple of Yahweh."

**Rahlfs**, (taking up the last line in **verse 19**) κύριε τῆς σωτηρίας μου καὶ οὐ παύσομαι εὐλογῶν σε μετὰ ψαλτηρίου πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας τῆς ζωῆς μου κατέναντι τοῦ οἴκου τοῦ θεοῦ, "...O Lord of my salvation / deliverance; and I will not cease praising / blessing You with a harp / stringed instrument all the days of my life, before the house / temple of the God!"

(continued...)

<sup>95</sup>(...continued)

Alexander comments that “The general sense...is that of public and perpetual praise, the promise of which closes this remarkable production.” (P. 87)

<sup>96</sup>Slotki comments on **verses 21-22** that they both “describe events that occurred before Hezekiah wrote the psalm just concluded. **Verse 22** which has no answer here is also found in **2 Kings 20:8** and is followed in **verses 9-11** by Isaiah’s reply which corresponds, with a number of variations, to **verses 7-8** of this chapter.” (P. 182)

Motyer entitles these two verses “Hezekiah’s healing,” and states that “This is a final piece of background to the arrival of the embassy [from Babylon] in **Isaiah 39:1**. In **2 Kings 20:7-8** the medical prescription Isaiah gave and the King’s request for a sign are embedded in the narrative. Here they are isolated as demanding attention in their own right...Having asked for a sign to support his faith he failed to maintain his walk of faith. Ahaz faithlessly refused to ask (**Isaiah 7:10ff.**); Hezekiah asked but faithlessly failed to act conformably.” (P. 295)

Oswalt entitles the two verses “Additional notes.” He comments that “It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that these verses were not a part of the original Isaianic composition. They appear very much like an after-thought in their present position... This feeling is only heightened when the parallel account in **2 Kings 20** is consulted.”

Oswalt suggests three alternatives for explaining this:

- (1) **Isaiah** is original and **Kings** is dependent;
- (2) **Kings** is original and **Isaiah** is dependent;
- (3) both are dependent on a common original, but **Isaiah 37:20-21** has been added later to harmonize with the **Kings** account.

Oswalt states that he favors the third option. He thinks that “the writer [of **Isaiah**] never intended to include the details now found in **verses 21-22**, not feeling them essential to what he was attempting to say. However, a later copyist, knowing both versions and perhaps feeling that unintentional omissions had occurred, added the information from **Kings** at the end of the **Isaiah** account...”

“As the account stands, these verses appear as explanatory notes, giving background to what has already been presented.” (Pp. 690-91)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 21**: “*And Isaiah said, Let him take a lump (or cake) of figs, and rub them (or lay them softened) on the boil (or inflammation), and he shall live (or let him live) i.e. recover.*”

Watts comments that ‘Now that the weighty matters that pressed upon the King’s mind and heart have been dealt with, a simple medical procedure can deal with the boil.

(continued...)

וַיִּמְרְתוּ עַל־הַשָּׁחִין וַיְחִי:

And Isaiah said, let them take up a compress of figs,  
and let them rub it upon the boil, and he will live!<sup>97</sup>

38:22 וַיֹּאמֶר חֶזְקִיָּהוּ

מָה אֵת כִּי אֵעֲלֶה בֵּית יְהוָה:

And Hezekiah said,

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<sup>96</sup>(...continued)

Figs were used as medicine throughout the Ancient Near East, in Ugarit with horses...in Mesopotamia for human toothache and lung problems...in Old Egypt for constipation, in Arabia for the plague, and in Turkey even in modern times...The application of a fig paste appears to have been a very ordinary and usual medical procedure in contrast to the unusual sign.” (P. 52)

<sup>97</sup>Oswalt comments on **verse 21**, that “It explains that whatever the disease may have been, one of its symptoms was a boil. Furthermore, though it is not explicitly stated, we are led to believe that the miracle of healing was achieved through the application of a poultice of figs. This is an important point in any theology of healing. All healing is of God. Sometimes He intervenes directly to produce health. At other times He works through intervening means, as here...If the poultice was instrumental in Hezekiah’s healing, it was still Divine providence which brought Isaiah to Hezekiah’s bedside with the remedy at that moment.” (P. 691)

Kaiser states that “If Yahweh Himself intends to prolong the life of the sick King Hezekiah of Judah by fifteen years (compare **verse 5**), the prophet’s manipulation with the cake of figs comes somewhat late; it looks as though the prophet is trying to lend his God a helping hand.” (P. 400)

Such a comment implies that if believers trust in Divine promises of healing, they should do nothing on their own to promote healing—a very naive and harmful view of the relationship between science and religion. We say, pray for healing; trust God’s promises; and do everything in your power to bring about healing!

What do you think?

Kaiser later states that “The essence of the story is what seems impossible to men in their everyday life, but what the pious imagination and a faith reflecting profoundly upon the power of God nevertheless regards as possible, a miracle.” (Pp. 402-03)

What sign (is there) that I will go up (to) YHWH's house / temple?<sup>98, 1</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 22**: “*And Hezekiah said, What sign that I shall go up (to) the house of Jehovah?* The ellipsis is easily supplied by reading, *what sign dost thou give*, or *what sign is there*, or more simply still, *what is the sign?*... The question is more fully given in **2 Kings 20:8** as follows: *And Hezekiah said to Isaiah, What sign that Jehovah is about to heal me, and that I shall go up, on the third day, to the house of Jehovah?* The reference is to the promise as recorded in **verse 5** of the same chapter. *Return and say to Hezekiah, the chief of My people, Thus said Jehovah, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears; behold, I am about to heal thee; on the third day thou shalt go up to the house of Jehovah.* The last two verses of this chapter in **Isaiah** are evidently out of their chronological order.” (P. 87)

Alexander explains all of this as follows: “The passage before us is the first draught or original form of Isaiah’s narrative, in which the facts recorded in these two last verses were added by a kind of after-thought, and that in re-writing the account, as a part of the national history, he naturally placed them in their chronological order.” (P. 88)

Slotki comments on **verse 22** that “This question...has no answer here. Others render: ‘what a good sign is this (the rapid cure) that I will (also) go up to the house of the Lord!’” (P. 182)

Oswalt states that “Such a request for a sign could be understood as ‘tempting’ or testing God in a negative sense (**Deuteronomy 6:16; Matthew 4:7**); the person doubts God and demands proof. This kind of testing is forbidden (compare **Malachi 3:15; Matthew 12:39; John 6:30**). But there is a positive sense in which such a request may be understood: the person who does believe and asks for confirmation (see **Isaiah 7:10; Judges 6:36-40; Malachi 3:10**). God delights to show Himself powerful to that person, as He did to Hezekiah.” (P. 691)

Watts explains **verses 1-8** and **21-22** as follows: “The story appears to have originally been a simple account of prolonged life as an answer to prayer. The psalm (**Isaiah 38:9-20**) fits this intention. But by placing the story after **chapters 36-37 (= 2 Kings 18-19)**...a political perspective has been added. Hezekiah’s life and reign had been threatened by the Assyrian siege and by his illness. One would have expected that he would have died either from the infection or because of the policies of rebellion that provoked the Assyrian invasion. God’s initial judgment supports that expectation which, as far as the political aspect is concerning the [**Book of Isaiah**] had developed concerning Hezekiah’s ministers in **chapter 22**.

“But the remarkable fact was that Hezekiah reigned for fifteen more years and gained a reputation in history (**2 Kings 18-20**) for being a pious and brave king. The story accounts for this by telling of his plea to Yahweh which cited his piety. History agreed with that evaluation. Yahweh hears his prayer, is moved by his emotion, and

(continued...)

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<sup>98</sup>(...continued)

grants a reprieve of fifteen more years of life. But Yahweh's response through the prophet Isaiah does not grant grace because of the King's piety. He saves Hezekiah and the city. **2 Kings 20:6** in a phrase not included in Isaiah makes it explicit: 'for My

sake and the sake of David your father.' Grace is motivated by Yahweh's Own purposes and by His promise to David.

"Hezekiah needed a sign. That, too, was granted although the events called for no further act of faith from Hezekiah. After the assurance met his spiritual and mental needs, medicine brought healing to his boil. Hezekiah would go to worship again and relative order would gradually return to his poor beleaguered country." (P. 53)

(continued...)

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<sup>98</sup>(...continued)

1. TMSJ 9/1 (Spring 1998) 39-61  
**ISRAEL'S MISSION TO THE NATIONS IN ISAIAH 40–55: AN UPDATE**  
by Michael A. Grisanti Associate Professor of **Old Testament**,  
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“In describing Israel’s relationship to the nations, **Isaiah 40–55** represents three loci of tension:

either Divine blessings for Israel alone or for the entire world also;  
Israel as either an active witness or a passive one;  
either the nations as subject to Israel or as coequal with Israel in their  
standing before God.

Israel’s mission to the world is either centripetal (inward moving) or centrifugal (outward moving). Biblical scholars have debated which it is. Attempts to explain fluctuation in the prophet’s message between the two possibilities have included elimination of certain passages, consideration of redactional layers, redefinition of terms, and pointing out external circumstances in the prophet’s time...

“A correct understanding does not consist in explaining away one side of the tension, but in recognizing God’s future restoration of the nation as a means of extending redemptive benefits to the nations, His blessing of the nations after their judgment, and His use of Israel to rule the nations at the same time that His chosen people are a vehicle to bless the nations.

“Both the beginning and end of Scripture emphasize a concern for people of “every nation and tribe and tongue and people” (**Revelation 14:6**), forming a grand envelope structure framing the entire story of Scripture. **Genesis 1–11** provides an overview of the origins and early history of all humankind, and **Revelation** ends the canon with a **book** in which God’s purposes are equally related to the whole created order.

“Then a new development takes place at **Genesis 12** with the call of Abraham. Clearly related to God’s dealings with the nations and placed specifically in the context of the disintegration of human society and dispersion of the nations in **Genesis 11**, the call of Abraham shifts the focus of attention from the entire created order to God’s election of and dealings with a chosen people, beginning with a covenant with the nation of Abraham (Israel). By means of this unilateral agreement, the Lord details the way in which He will bless all peoples.

“In the remainder of the **Old Testament**, a degree of tension exists between Israel and the nations, that is, between the fact of Israel’s election and the concept of world mission.

“Throughout her history Israel had to grapple with the reality that she was related to all the nations through creation and that God had also called her to be separate from them. The Abrahamic Covenant, which gives Israel an exalted place in God’s program for the world, promises that Israel will be a channel of blessing to “all peoples on earth”

**(Genesis 12:3)**. In His choice of Israel to be His elect people, Yahweh bestows on them both blessings and responsibilities. He promises to give His elect people a position of power and prominence in the world. Yahweh intends to utilize Israel as His servant nation to carry out His plan for all humanity. In **Exodus 19:4-6**, Yahweh presents Israel with a unique and sobering challenge (before revealing to them the Law, i.e., the Mosaic Covenant). Doubtless, their conformity to the Law would have caused them to be a distinct nation among the pagan nations of the world. However, that distinctiveness was not an end in itself.

“From the very outset, this divinely-intended distinctiveness carried with it worldwide implications. By conducting their lives in conformity with the demands of the Law, the nation of Israel would have been able to function as God’s servant nation, representing God and His character before the surrounding nations of the world.

“Various aspects of her national existence also contributed to Israel’s consciousness of her distinctiveness. Jacob and his descendants enjoyed a separate existence in Egypt (in the land of **Goshen—Genesis 46:31-34**) for a number of years. By means of the Law, Yahweh clearly demonstrated that Israel’s relationship with Him demanded a moral and ritual distinctiveness (**Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2**).

“Prior to their entrance into Canaan, Yahweh instructed His chosen people to exterminate all the inhabitants and to avoid every pagan custom in order to maintain their uniqueness. As the nation of Israel developed, certain Gentiles enjoyed divine redemptive benefits only by virtue of their access to Israel. This tension between Israel’s election and her worldwide witness reached a climax in **Isaiah 40–55**.

“In the years leading up to Isaiah’s prophetic ministry, the nation of Israel often failed to live in accordance with her God-given function, i.e., serving as Yahweh’s servant nation. As a nation she became characterized by covenant rebellion. The northern ten tribes (also called Israel) were soon to go into Assyrian exile, and the southern two tribes (Judah) would be left alone in the land.

“In **Isaiah 1–39** Yahweh delivered His stinging indictment against the nation Israel (focusing on the southern kingdom): Divine judgment is coming because of your covenant treachery! As with any nation that refused to submit to Yahweh’s sovereignty (compare **Isaiah 13–23**), Israel’s covenant Lord promised to punish her arrogance. However, Israel’s disobedient conduct was especially reprehensible. As God’s covenant partner, God’s chosen nation had become like an adulterous wife.

“In **chapters 40–66** the prophet Isaiah looked to Israel’s more distant future. What will happen after God’s judgment on His covenant nation is completed? Is God through with His obstinate and stiff-necked people? Will He allow them to remain forever in exile, cut off from any enjoyment of promised covenantal blessings?

“The prophet Isaiah answered these (and other) fateful questions in **chapters 40–55**. In these chapters he envisioned the nation of Israel in the midst of the Babylonian exile. He introduced this section by telling God’s exiled people that their punishment for covenant treachery had satisfied the demands of God’s wrath. The

prophet comforted God's people by promising them that God would bring them back to their beloved land of promise. In the face of Israel's skepticism, Isaiah described Yahweh as the one and only true God who is willing and able to bring to pass this promise. Unlike the "do-nothing" pagan Gods, Yahweh alone is able to predict and bring to pass events, a case in point being His call of Cyrus several decades before his birth.

"As the prophet addressed God's people who are depicted as being in the midst of exile, Isaiah had to deal with the other nations of the world. How will Yahweh treat those nations that resist the accomplishment of His intentions? How will the restoration of Israel to national and international prominence affect the Gentiles? Is there any potential for Gentile participation in any of God's abundant blessings on Israel?

"More specifically, does the prophet Isaiah give God's chosen people a new and unique commission to be missionaries to the Gentiles? Or is He an ardent nationalist Who only has Israel's welfare in view?

"A clear understanding of Isaiah's depiction of Israel's relationship with the nations depends on asking the right questions. What are the primary issues in this discussion? What terms accurately describe the potential interpretive options? In order to understand better the tension between "nationalism" and "universalism" in **Isaiah 40–55**, this article seeks to provide a summary and a historical survey of this debate. Only a clear presentation of the constitutive issues and a comprehension of the terminology common to this debate will produce a precise and accurate understanding of this realm of theological discussion.

### **Foundational Issues: Potential Points of Tension**

"Certain passages in **Isaiah 40–55** affirm that the nations who fight against Israel will be defeated (**41:11-13; 49:25; 51:22-23; 54:15-17**), are expendable as a ransom for Israel's sake (**43:3-4**), will come before Israel in chains, lick the dust off Israel's feet, and even eat their own flesh (**45:14; 49:23, 26a**), while Yahweh addresses Israel in intimate terms.

"On the other hand, Yahweh calls upon the nations to turn and be saved (**45:22-23**), appoints the servant as "a light of the nations" (**42:6; 49:6**), and declares that His salvation will reach to all peoples who wait to receive His instruction and deliverance (**42:4, 23; 49:6; 51:4-6**). The nations will be amazed at the salvation which the Lord has accomplished for Israel (**41:5; 42:10-12; 45:6; 52:10**), and recognizing Yahweh as God, they will run of their own accord to serve Israel, God's witness people.

"In light of this tension scholars have repeatedly asked a probing question concerning this section of **Isaiah**: "What relationship does Israel have with the nations of the world and what does God have in store for these two entities?" **Isaiah 40–55** brings to the fore at least three related loci of tension with regard to Israel and the nations...extent, function, and relationship.

### **Three Related Loci of Tension in **Isaiah 40–55****

Israel Only versus Israel and Nations Equal

Passive Witness or Active Witness

Nations Subject Israel and Nations Subject to Israel...

How comprehensive are Yahweh's redemptive promises (extent), what is Israel's role in any provision of divine blessings to non-Jews (function), and what is the relationship of Israel to the nations which become the beneficiaries of those promises (relationship)? In other words, does the prophet offer salvation to the entire world?

Israel's Mission to the Nations in **Isaiah 40–55**, and the question of "universalism":

See: T. K. Cheyne, **Introduction to the Book of Isaiah** (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1895) 244.

Cheyne's use of "universalism" predates the theological discussion that deals with the question, "Are the heathen really lost?" Many problems in the interpretation of **Isaiah** stem from disparate uses of the term "universalism."

Herbert G. May defines "theological universalism" as "belief in one God who is to be worshiped by all peoples, Jew and Gentile alike. It comprehends a single world religion and a common religious culture; it implies a single cultus" ("Theological Universalism in the Old Testament," **Journal of Bible and Religion** 16 [1948]: 100). Against the **Old Testament** backdrop of divine blessings promised to Israel, this term concerns itself with the question of whether the nations of the world will also share in those privileges.

Two kinds of universalism are considered: centripetal universalism (movement toward the center--the nations attracted to Yahweh by means of Israel's devotion to Yahweh) and centrifugal universalism (movement away from the center—the outward movement by Israel to confront the nations with Yahweh's expectations).

Nationalism or particularism can be defined as that "tendency in religion according to which a certain group enjoys a special privilege in relation to God which sets it apart from the rest of humanity" (Julian Morgenstern, "Universalism and Particularism," **The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia**, I. Landman, editor [New York: Universal Jewish Encyclopedia Company, 1943] 10:357).

"Nationalism" defies a fixed definition, but draws its nuance from its historical and cultural setting (Deryck C. T. Sheriffs, "'A Tale of Two Cities'—Nationalism in Zion and Babylon," **Tyndale Bulletin** 39 [1988]:19). Sheriffs suggests that in a general sense 'nationalism' is an 'ideology, that is, a set of ideas used to stress a nation's aspirations by an influential group within it' (**ibid.**). It is an ideology that unifies the smaller elements (clans, tribes, villages, cities) in a greater whole, the nation-state, world, and if so, will those non-Jewish peoples still be subject to God's chosen people? And what role does Israel play with regard to this extension of salvation to the Gentile world?

Does Isaiah regard Israel as commissioned to bring salvation to the nations as an active participant, or does he view Israel simply as a passive witness? Finally, is the nation of Israel the primary beneficiary of divine blessings or has God promised to bless equally all peoples, whether Jew or Gentile? Do God's chosen people occupy an exalted position in a yet future period of God's domain, or will they share equally their blessedness and prominence with the nations?

"Scholars who have wrestled over the years with Isaiah's depiction of Israel's relationship with the nations have sought for descriptive terms that represent the key issues in this debate. Certain terms are necessary to provide objective boundaries for this discussion, whether or not one agrees that the chosen terms satisfy the breadth of the discussion.

"Two positions form the outer parameters for the debate concerning Israel and the nations in **Isaiah 40–55**. Did the prophet possess a missionary spirit according to which he exhorted God's chosen people to become "a nation of world-traversing missionaries" (referred to as 'universalism' in the context of this debate)? Or was Isaiah an intensely nationalistic prophet who sought to preserve the faith and integrity of the Israelites scattered among the nations and to encourage them with the hope of their restoration at the nations' expense?

"This debate surrounding nationalism and universalism is complicated by the disparate use of these terms. This is especially true for universalism. Does 'universalism' signify Israel's active participation in the preaching of the gospel to the world, the nations' free acceptance of divine blessings, or simply the nations' recognition of Yahweh's sovereignty? Regardless, this is not the meaning of the 'universalism' so frequently referred to in contemporary discussions. The 'universalism' in recent discussion, in one way or another, denies that the 'heathen' are really lost.

"For a survey of this debate, see Millard Erickson, **The State of the Question, Through No Fault of Their Own? The Fate of Those Who Have Never Heard**, W. V. Crockett and J. G. Sigountos, eds. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991) 23-33.

"In the present work 'universalism' does not refer to the spiritual lostness of the nations, but rather to the extent of the offer of divine salvation. At issue is the question, 'Is redemption only for Israel or does Isaiah teach that it is for all nations?'

"It is not the purpose of this article to delineate the blessings that Israel and the nations will share equally and those that have a more direct impact on Israel. In light of **Old Testament** references to a restored national presence for Israel, the millennial restoration of the Jerusalem Temple, and indications of an Israelite functional priority during the millennium, it appears that Israel will directly participate in certain blessings, blessings which will less directly impact the nations. For example, the fulfillment of land promises to Israel will impact Gentiles also during the millennium.

"Walter Vogels, "Covenant and Universalism: Guide for a Missionary Reading of the Old Testament," **Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft** 57 (1973):31. For a fuller explanation of his approach to this

issue, see his **God's Universal Covenant: A Biblical Study** (Ottawa: University of Ottawa, 1979).

“In their purest forms, the terms ‘universalism’ (God’s redemptive blessings available for all peoples regardless of ethnicity) and ‘nationalism’ (God’s redemptive blessings reserved for Israel alone) contribute to the issue of extent. In other words, to whom are divine redemptive blessings given? As was stated earlier, the matter of extent is only one of the significant issues at stake in the prophet’s message concerning Israel and the nations. If the nations will receive redemptive blessings akin to those originally promised to Israel, by what means does this take place (function)?

“Once the nations become recipients of these blessings, is there a total merging of Israel with the nations or will the Gentiles be subject to God’s chosen people for a time (relationship)?

“Vogels categorizes Israel’s role and mission with regard to the world as either centripetal (inward moving) or centrifugal (outward moving) universalism. Centripetal universalism is found in biblical texts that attribute to Israel the role of being a sign and witness, of attracting others. The attracted nations come to the ‘center,’ to Israel (Zion, Jerusalem), to receive instruction and revelation (e.g., **Psalm 87; Isaiah 2:2-3; 25:6 ff.; 55:3b-5; Micah 4:1-2.**).

“Centrifugal universalism describes Israel’s active involvement in bringing God’s redemptive message to the world. This latter set of terms concerns the questions of extent and function, but does not directly contribute to the issue of relationship. Does this ‘centrifugal universalism’ result in total equality for Israel and the nations, or will there still exist some manner of Jewish priority and distinctiveness of identity?

“Since the common bipolar descriptive terms only partially delineate the issues relevant to the debate, the interpreter must ask additional questions concerning Israel’s Mission to the Nations in **Isaiah 40–55.**

“It is noteworthy that the debate concerning nationalism-universalism also rages outside **Isaiah 40–55.** H. Wheeler Robinson (**The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament, Studies in Theology** [London: Duckworth, 1913] 206) and T. W. Manson (**The Teaching of Jesus: Studies of Its Form and Content**, 2nd ed. [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1948] 181) identify a great contrast between the message of Isaiah and that of Ezekiel. They contend that Isaiah teaches nationalism and presents the concept of a saved remnant while Ezekiel conveys universalism and sets forth a saving remnant. Paul quotes **Isaiah 49:6b** in an attempt to convince the Jews of Antioch Pisidia that God was indeed behind the extension of redemptive blessings to the Gentiles (apart from any process of proselytism).

Martin Luther, **Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 40–66**, Luther’s Works, H. T. A. Bowman, translator (St. Louis: Concordia, 1954-75) 17:135; John Calvin, **Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah**, W. Pringle, translator (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1850-54) 3:424-25.

Gustav Friedrich Oehler, **Theology of the Old Testament**, G. E. Day, revised (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1873; reprint, Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1978) 516-21;

Bernhard Duhm, **Das Buch Jesaia: übersetzt und erklärt [The Book of Isaiah: Translated and Explained]**, 4th edition, **Göttinger Handkommentar zum Alten Testament** (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1922) 345, 376;

J. Skinner, **The Book of the Prophet Isaiah: Chapters XL–LXVI**, Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1917) lxiii;

Georg Fohrer, **Das Buch Jesaja [The Book of Isaiah]**, Zürcher Bibel Kommentare (Zürich: Verlag Zwingli, 1964) 3:96;

James Muilenburg, "Introduction to and Exegesis of the Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66," **Interpreter's Bible**, G. A. Buttrick, ed. (New York: Abingdon, 1955) 5:532;

Claus Westermann, **Isaiah 40–66**, D. M. G. Stalker, translator, OTL the issues of extent, role, and relationship.

#### A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF THE DEBATE

"Several works delineate the history of scholarship with regard to this discussion (nationalism versus universalism in **Isaiah 40–55**, see below). For the sake of completeness, this article will survey the earlier stages of discussion, albeit briefly. It will devote more attention to the last half of the twentieth century in order to highlight the more recent developments with regard to this issue. The following description frames the debate with the two polar positions (nationalism and universalism) only to provide structure. Divergent answers to the issues of extent, role, and relationship will make apparent a certain degree of diversity within each general position. This survey of interpretive options considers two issues: Isaiah's depiction of Israel's relationship to the nations and several attempts made to explain the fluctuation between universalism / nationalism and blessing / subjugation in the prophet's message.

Isaiah's Depiction of Israel's Relationship to the Nations--Isaiah as a Missionary Prophet (Centrifugal Universalism)

Prior to 1950, most biblical scholars agreed that in **Isaiah 40–55** the prophet envisioned the extension of salvation to the nations. The **New Testament (Acts 13:47)**, certain Reformation writers, and several scholars from the critical era (nineteenth-twentieth centuries) perpetuated this view.

Sellin, "**Der Missionsgedanke im Alten Testament**" ["**The Concept of Missions in the Old Testament**"], *Neue Allgemeine Missionszeitschrift* 2 (1925):68 ff.

Edmond Jacob, **Theology of the Old Testament**, A. W. Heathcote and P. J. Allcock, translators. (New York: Harper and Row, 1958) 220.

Paul Volz, **Jesaja II, übersetzt und erklärt [Second Isaiah: Translated and**

**Explained**], KAT (Leipzig: A. Deichert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung D. Werner Scholl, 1932) 24.

Paul Volz, **Prophetengestalten des Alten Testament: Sendung und Botschaft der alttestamentlichen Gotteszeugen [Prophetic Forms of the Old Testament: The Program and Message of the Old Testament Divine Witnesses]** (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1949) 316.

H. H. Rowley (**The Faith of Israel: Aspects of Old Testament Thought** [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957] 185) argues that for the prophet "universalism was the corollary of monotheism, and the world-wide mission of Israel the corollary of her election."

Rowley (**The Missionary Message of the Old Testament** [London: Carey, 1944] 50) cites **Isaiah 45:21 ff.** as one of several passages where the appeal to the world rests firmly upon the truth of monotheism. The prophet teaches that Israel will become a missionary to the nations of the world. Isaiah is regarded as the father of Jewish missionary activity and is called the "missionary prophet of the Old Testament."

Isaiah's introduction of centrifugal universalism.

In the early part of this century, Volz argued that the prophet demonstrates a peculiar advancement in the biblical presentation of God's plan for the world. After describing Israel's function as a passive witness to the nations, Isaiah looks forward to "the eschatological turning point" at which time "the propagation of God's kingdom should be carried out in an intentional and active fashion by Israel." Volz titles his treatment of the first three servant songs with the heading "the founder of mission," and identifies the missionary outreach of Israel as the central concern of these songs. In a later volume, Volz asserts that the readers of the first servant song stand "at the origin of mission, at the source of world missionary activity." In general, the prophet presents ". . . the divine missionary intention and the God-ordained missionary duty of Israel."

The theological foundation for centrifugal universalism. Monotheism and God's election of Israel serve as the theological foundation for this view of the prophet Isaiah. From the belief that Yahweh is the only God, the prophet implies that all nations must know Him and that Israel's duty is to make His name known to the ends of the earth.

Israel's Mission to the Nations in **Isaiah 40–55**: an Update

Jacob, **Theology of the Old Testament** 217, 219. Jacob contends that Israel, for the most part, was unable to attain the prophet's ideal because of the practical limitations of the postexilic community and the consequent reworking of the prophet's material to give it a more nationalistic emphasis (ibid., 220).

Rowley (**Missionary Message** 51) states that just as Yahweh sent Moses to call Israel to Himself, He sends Israel to call the world to Himself. He goes on to assert that "the fundamental purpose of Israel's election was that she should mediate the revelation of God to men." Jacob, **Theology of the Old Testament** 220.

C. C. Torrey, **The Second Isaiah: A New Interpretation** (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928)

Manson, **The Teaching of Jesus: Studies of Its Form and Content** 180.

After his comparison of **Isaiah 40–55** and cuneiform royal inscriptions, Shalom M. Paul argues that Israel's mission is "not one of world conquest as in the Mesopotamian inscriptions...but rather one of world salvation" ("**Deutero-Isaiah and Cuneiform Royal Inscriptions**," **Journal of the American Oriental Society** 88 [1968]: 186).

Jacob asserts that God's election of Israel (in Abraham) leads of necessity to a missionary duty. Israel's commission to be holy (distinct from other nations), as well as the regular presence of external military threats, hindered the outworking of this responsibility. The concern to be unique and the need to defend herself against invading armies forced Israel to have an inwardly focused perspective. From the time of the conquest of Canaan until the sixth century B.C. (the time of "Deutero-Isaiah" [according to the critics]), this missionary duty was only centripetal. Though Jacob understands that the final triumph of Yahweh over all the peoples belongs to the eschaton, he argues that Isaiah once again brings to the forefront Israel's compelling missionary duty. In addition to Israel's power of attraction (**Isaiah 54:1-3**), the elect nation will exercise a more active mission by means of her role as the light of the nations and, less directly, through the Servant's ministry. In fact, by sacrifice and death, the Servant rediscovers the election and its indispensable corollary, the mission.

Others echo that understanding of the prophet's explanation of the transition from passive to active witness. Torrey asserts that Isaiah's new truth involves the inclusion of the whole Gentile world, side by side with Israel, in the family of the one God. Manson writes that the prophet exhorts Israel "to conquer the world...by spiritual power...to bring men under the sway of Jehovah...to attract individual men and women to voluntary acceptance of Israel's King as their king."

Debate concerning terminology.

In the last several decades of this century, certain scholars have preferred the terms "centripetal-centrifugal" rather than "nationalism-universalism" to describe the development of Israel's function in God's program. Besides the works by Vogels cited above, Dussel takes that position, contending that in contrast to the centripetal preaching common in the Old Testament (with Enrique Dussel, "**Universalismo y Misión en los Poemas del Siervo de Jahveh [Universalism and Mission in the Poems of the Servant of Yahweh,]**" *Ciencia y Fe* 20 (1964): 419-64.

Bernard Wodecki, "**Heilsuniversalismus im Buch des Propheten Jesaja**" [**Universal Salvation in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah**,] *Dein Wort Beachten: Alttestamentliche Aufsätze*, J. Reindl and G. Hentschel, editors (Leipzig: St. Benno-Verlag, 1981) 76-101.

Wodecki's viewpoint concerning the entire book is an outgrowth of his 1977

dissertation which dealt with universal salvation in First Isaiah, “**Der Heilsuniversalismus beim Propheten Proto-Jesaja**,” [the German title of the Polish dissertation; English, “**Universal Salvation According to the Prophet Proto-Isaiah**”] (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Warsaw, 1977).

Robert Martin-Achard, **A Light to the Nations: A Study of the Old Testament Conception of Israel’s Mission to the World**, J. P. Smith, translator (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1962) 6.

Wodecki writes, “The spirit of universal salvation permeates the entire book of Isaiah.” 33, 34, 100, 101.

**Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible**, s.v. “Isaïe (le livre d’)” [“The Book of Isaiah”], by A. Feuillet, 4 (1949):706-11;

A. Gélin, “**The Latter Prophets**,” **Introduction to the Old Testament**, P. Skehan, et al., translators (New York: Desclee, 1968) 341-42;

Jacinto Núñez Regodón, “**El Universalismo de Los Cantos del Siervo**” [“**The Universalism of the Songs of the Servant**”], *Palabra Y Vida: Homenaje a José Alonso Díaz en su 70 cumpleaños*, A. Vargas-Machuca and G. Ruiz, eds. (Madrid: UPCM, 1984) 75-76.

(With Jerusalem as center), the servant songs preach centrifugal universalism that knows no boundaries. All nations and islands are worthy of God’s mercy. In more recent times Wodecki finds biblical legitimation for worldwide missions throughout the **Book of Isaiah**. Not only is Isaiah, to use Martin-Achard’s description, “the outstanding missionary prophet,” but Wodecki contends that the motif of universalism is central to the entire **Book of Isaiah**. There is a gradual deepening of this motif as one moves from the first to the second half of the book. According to Wodecki, in the first half of **Isaiah (chapters 1–39)** the majority of passages speak generally of the acceptance of belief in Yahweh by the foreign peoples and of their pilgrimage to Zion. In the second part (**chapters 40–55**) the servant (whom Wodecki identifies as the Messiah) will bring God’s law and teaching to the most distant peoples, and God’s people will function as His witnesses before those nations. Looking forward to the **New Testament**, Wodecki argues, “The **Book of Isaiah** constitutes an extremely important means for realizing God’s plan of salvation. It appears as a prepared prelude to the missionary instructions of Christ...and its realization in the missionary activity of the universal Church.”

Feuillet, Gélin, and Regodón contend that the servant songs delineate a decentralized universalism which constitutes a departure from the customary royal mediation found in antecedent Scriptures (e.g., **Psalms 72**). These scholars prefer the descriptive term “decentralized universalism” over the customary pair, centripetal-centrifugal universalism, in order to avoid any connotations of Israel’s Mission to the Nations in **Isaiah 40–55**.

Regodón and Vogels affirm that “all nations will share in [Yahweh’s salvation] through the mediation of the servant.” The following points highlight a few of the

differences:

1. The iniquity of God's people is expiated. 1. Expiation for Israel's sin yet awaits.
2. Political and religious salvation are related / connected. 2. Political and religious salvation are unrelated / connected.
3. Literal captivity and liberation 3. Spiritual captivity and liberation
4. Israel's salvation occasions the conversion of the Gentiles 4. The servant's ministry occasions the conversion of the Gentiles.

Contra Feuillet, the present author concludes in another work (Michael A. Grisanti, "**The Relationship of Israel and the Nations in Isaiah 40–55**" [PhD dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1993] 78-90) that only Israelites are in view in **Isaiah 44:1-5**.

Proselytism in this anticipated mission of Israel.

Regodón maintains that the prophet did not explicitly intend to discuss universalism, but that this perspective is a consequence of his announcement of deliverance for Israel. He places the emphasis on mediation rather than centrality. He explains, "In this sense it is a universalism of mediation: the salvation of Israel will be such that it will reach the nations one way or another." Consequently, he suggests that Israel's mission consists of being a passive witness for its own existence and thereby, the greatness of Yahweh.

According to Feuillet, this decentralized universalism is one "where the Temple no longer plays any role," and "where the Davidic Messiah has no place and where the chosen people have only the role of a passive witness to God, the eschatological Savior." Feuillet highlights the differences between the message of **Isaiah 40–55** and that of the servant songs, primarily seen in the transition from emphasis on Israel's mediation to the ministry of the messianic servant figure. Although somewhat limited by the nationalistic aims of **Isaiah 40–55**, Feuillet argues that decentralized universalism "truly attains its most perfect expression with the songs of the Servant." He argues that Israel is not without connection to the extension of divine redemption in the eschaton nor do they mediate that redemption. According to Feuillet, Yahweh will make Israel to be a *berît 'am* (cf. **Isaiah 42:6; 49:8**), "that is to say, the point of departure of a new union or alliance with humanity, simply by restoring the chosen people." **Isaiah 44:3-5** describes this new unity of Jews and Gentiles where pagans join themselves to the chosen people. Feuillet asserts that in this description "we have there quite simply the realization of the universal... They are careful not to confuse proselytism (the incorporation of individual Gentiles into the community of Israel) that always existed in Israel's religious traditions with some kind of a missionary commission. Martin-Achard writes, "In a certain sense Jewish proselytism is a private enterprise undertaken by individuals and concerned with particular persons, while the concept of mission involves the belief that the whole community has a task to fulfill on behalf of all mankind."

In defining universalism, Martin-Achard "asserts that the God of Israel is the Lord of all the earth, but does not propose that the Chosen People should take any particular

action towards converting the nations to Him.” Universalism merely refers to the extent of God’s program, not to the actual extension of redemptive blessings to anyone outside of Israel.

Albert Gélin (**The Religion of Israel**, J. R. Foster, translator [New York: Hawthorn, 1959] 79) concludes that the Bible sets forth a concept of universalism that does not precisely develop into a missionary attitude, that is, human participation in converting the races of the world. An earlier passage from the same volume clouds his attempt to distinguish between these terms (universalism versus mission). There he writes, “The call to proselytize is the particular message of the Second Isaias (**Isaias 45.22-4; 44.5**)” (ibid., 72). As a result of Isaiah’s prophetic ministry, Israel moves from a witness function (drawing a few into the Jewish fold by their testimony to God’s character) to a missionary focus (active proselytizing). Israel’s role was to cause the Gentiles to recognize Yahweh’s glory (by their restoration to the land). This would serve as the starting-point for a massive conversion of Gentiles to Yahweh (ibid., 83-84), promises which have to do with the numerous descendants of the patriarchs and the participation of the nations in the privileges of the chosen people (**Genesis 12:2-3**; cf. **Isaiah 51:2-3**).”

Decentralized universalism contends that the ministry of the servant figure replaces Israel in her mediatorial role.

#### Isaiah as a Nationalistic Prophet (Centripetal Universalism)

In the 1950's the tide of scholarly consensus began to turn away from a universalistic understanding of **Isaiah 40–55**. The other primary alternative for depicting Israel’s relationship to the nations describes Isaiah as a strident prophet of nationalism, only preaching of Israel’s glorious future. As with the preceding alternative (Isaiah as a missionary prophet), a spectrum of views exists among those who contend that Isaiah primarily addressed Israel’s redemptive destiny. In general, all those who argue that Israel’s national future is the primary agenda of **Isaiah 40–55** affirm (to varying degrees) that any “universalistic” emphases are secondary or peripheral. Regardless, they all make a careful distinction between the terms “proselytism,” “universalism,” and “mission.” Beyond that, proponents of a more nationalistic perspective fall into two categories: those who affirm that Isaiah offers no salvation for the Gentiles and those who maintain that the prophet Isaiah picks up a motif from earlier biblical material (e.g., **Exodus 19:4-6**) and reminds the nation of her divine commission to be a passive witness to the pagan nations of the world.